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A  
BRIGADE  
OF  
THE OLD ARMY  
1914

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**A BRIGADE OF THE OLD ARMY**

**1914**



# A BRIGADE OF THE OLD ARMY

1914

BY

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UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

LONDON

EDWARD ARNOLD

1920

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**DEDICATED**  
**TO THE**  
**10TH INFANTRY BRIGADE**  
**1ST BN. THE ROYAL WARWICKSHIRE REGIMENT**  
**2ND BN. THE SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS**  
**1ST BN. THE ROYAL IRISH FUSILIERS**  
**2ND BN. THE ROYAL DUBLIN FUSILIERS**

TO THE  
ARMY

## PREFACE

THE account which follows of the operations of the 10th Infantry Brigade in France from August to November, 1914, was intended originally for the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men who served under my command during those eventful months. Many of those gallant fellows—indeed, it is to be feared the majority—have fallen in the service of their country ; but as the experiences of an infantry brigade commander during that critical period may possibly be of wider interest, I have decided to publish them. It is inevitable that such an account should contain a few inaccuracies, more especially so in a war of such magnitude as that from which we have just emerged victorious, where the outlook of a brigade commander is far more circumscribed than in those smaller campaigns in which the British Army has in the past so frequently been engaged. Nevertheless I have allowed the account to stand practically as it was written at the Front in the spring of 1915,

for to have taken advantage of fuller information acquired later would, I think, have diminished any value which it possesses as a representation of all that was known to me at the time the events were taking place.

A. HALDANE.

*November, 1919.*

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# A BRIGADE OF THE OLD ARMY

1914

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

AT the time of the outbreak of the European War I was in command of the 10th Infantry Brigade and other troops at Shorncliffe, where I had been quartered for nearly two years and a half. My brigade belonged to the 4th Division, which it was understood might be retained temporarily in the United Kingdom for purposes of home defence, and would later on follow the Expeditionary Force to the Continent. There was, however, small cause for anxiety lest our departure for the Front should be delayed, for it was apparent that every man and gun that could be spared from our shores would be required, in conjunction with our Allies, to assist in repelling the rolling tide of German invasion.

We were not long to remain undisturbed in our peace quarters, for while at dinner on the night of the 7th of August, before even our mobilization was complete, a telegram was received which contained orders for the brigade and a battery to move by rail to York, where

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they would come under the orders of Sir Herbert Plumer, the General Commanding-in-Chief the Northern Command. Little enough time was available for packing up one's belongings, though I had made some preparations to meet the possible arrival of a sudden order ; and at 1.20 a.m. on the 8th the first train, which carried brigade headquarters, steamed off, the remainder following at regular intervals in nine trains.

We reached our destination at 9 a.m., where several hours were spent in hunting for quarters for the troops, no barrack accommodation being available. Eventually it was arranged to distribute them in the grand stand on the Knavesmire Racecourse, in the Exhibition Hall, and in certain store sheds which Mr. Eric Geddes, of the North-Eastern Railway Company, speedily caused to be cleared and placed at my disposal. I was struck by the promptitude with which he appreciated my difficulties and the speed with which he helped to eliminate them, but at that time I had no idea that he was destined soon to rise to heights of far greater national usefulness. By some mistake, on their way to join the headquarters of the brigade, two half-battalions of different regiments got shunted on to the Great Eastern Railway system, and woke up after a night journey to find themselves at Cromer ! As their proper destination was unknown both to themselves and their conductors, they did not join the remainder of the brigade until the night of the 9th.

Meanwhile, as hostile raids on the coast were anticipated further north, I had been directed on the morning of that date to arrange with the railway authorities to move two battalions—2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders and 1st Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers—to Darlington. The necessary trains were quickly forthcoming, and at 1 p.m. the latter battalion moved off.

On arriving at Darlington the men were quartered in an empty school and in other buildings, the Mayor being most assiduous in providing for their comfort. The cause of our despatch further north was apparently due to the fact that the Admiralty, being fully occupied with securing the Channel for the passage to France of the Expeditionary Force, could not ensure that small raids should not penetrate to the east coast, and the presence also of numerous aliens, many of German extraction, at Hartlepool and Middlesbrough, made it desirable to have troops within easy reach of those places.

Next day I motored with my brigade-major—Major Daniell of the Seaforth Highlanders—to Middlesbrough, where I saw the Chief Constable, who told me that the local Germans, many of whom had made off home during the fortnight preceding the declaration of war, might possibly commit acts of a hostile nature, and that he was keeping a close watch on them. He mentioned that one of them had for some days been receiving cipher telegrams from Germany, and that another had recently left the country, and was known to



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have taken with him the plates necessary for producing a large-scale map of Yorkshire. After some further conversation with him we proceeded to West Hartlepool, where parties of Territorial troops, under the supervision of the commandant of the place, Colonel Robson, Royal Garrison Artillery, were engaged in making defences in close proximity to the seashore. On returning to Darlington, I found a communication from the headquarters at Newcastle inviting me to meet the General Officer Commanding the Northumbrian Division there next day for a conference on the situation. The letter stated that it was proposed to form a mobile column, consisting of the Durham Brigade of that division, with three batteries of Territorial artillery, which was intended to operate on both sides of the Tyne, and when employed south of that river would come under my orders. I felt some slight concern on getting this communication, as it sounded as if I was going to be tied to the east coast and not cross the Channel at once. However, my qualms were speedily set at rest on a telegram coming from York which directed me to return there with my troops as soon as the Durham Brigade had relieved us at Darlington. I thereupon informed the General at Newcastle that I did not now propose to come there, and next day, the 11th, at 3.30 p.m., I returned to York.

Two days later I was able to move half the brigade from its unsuitable quarters there to Strensall Camp,

where there was a chance of doing a little training and hardening the men's feet by route-marching. Ammunition for rifle practice was, however, unprocurable, for every round was stated to be required for training recruits at home, but we were able to carry out a certain amount of musketry work on miniature ranges.

In the ranks the proportion of reservists who had rejoined the colours on mobilization was very high, and such men, returning to military service after being out of harness for some time, were soft, more especially as to their lower extremities. It was highly probable that as soon as they were landed in France they would find themselves called upon to march long distances, carrying, of course, the soldier's heavy equipment, and therefore every hour's preliminary tramping on the roads would tell in their favour when the hour of trial came. Route-marching at daily increasing distances was therefore carried out, and a perceptible improvement became noticeable. The reservists of the Seaforth Highlanders, however, who, like the men of all kilted battalions, had had shoes issued to them, but who when in civil life had habitually worn boots, soon developed sore heels, and for some weeks there were several who, with the best intentions, were unable to keep pace with the column, and, like Agag, trod delicately in its wake.

As the weather promised to be warm on the other side of the Channel, I managed to procure khaki linen sunshades, which were made by local seamstresses and

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which could be attached to the men's headdress, but I must confess with sorrow that, light as they were, they were mostly flung away during the many fatiguing marches that ensued.

While at York I spent several pleasant hours at Bishopsthorpe with the hospitable Archbishop, and enjoyed some interesting talks with him on the events which were then so much in everyone's thoughts. As one wandered round the delightful gardens in which the Palace stands, away from the sight and sound of troops, it was hard to realize that the great war which we soldiers had for years felt coming nearer and nearer had at length broken out, and that before many days we should find ourselves hurled into the very thick of it. But amid this scene of sylvan beauty, where everything around spoke only of peace and quiet, it was in vain to attempt to picture another and far different scene which was then developing in France and Belgium. One would soon know all about it, and until then the less one anticipated and conjured up visions of what might after all prove to be widely different from reality, the better would it be for one's present peace of mind.

In the interims of training I found time to visit several friends in the vicinity of the cathedral city, besides enjoying the hospitality of the General Commanding-in-Chief there.

On the 18th of August we moved by rail to Harrow, where my headquarters were camped in Weald Park,

the proprietor of which, an American, had just returned from Homburg, where, like other foreigners, he had been detained for several days. While here we continued our daily route-marches, and on the 20th Lieutenant-General Pulteney, who had been appointed to command the Third Army Corps, which then consisted solely of the 4th Division, visited my camp.

Next day the division, which was now assembled and encamped in the fields round Harrow, entrained for Southampton, where my headquarters arrived at 3 a.m. on the 22nd. The order had come for us to join the Expeditionary Force, of which the Cavalry Corps and four divisions had already crossed the Channel.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RETREAT

THE docks at Southampton, which were crowded with shipping, presented a busy but, considering what was in progress, a remarkably tranquil appearance. Here were we, a part of the greatest force which had ever been assembled to leave the shores of England in the space of so few days, about to embark on a venture from which few would return alive or uninjured, and yet, but for the season of the year, we might have been sharing in the annual trooping movement to the East. One sign, however, betrayed the difference of the situation, for from the docks of Southampton civilians were rigidly excluded, and we were thus spared the possible sight of harrowing farewells.

Little time was lost in getting the troops and transport on board the two large steamers which were to carry the 10th Infantry Brigade across the Channel. My headquarters, the 1st Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and a battery of the 29th Field Artillery Brigade, took possession of the S.S. *Caledonia* of the Anchor Line, which sailed under sealed orders at 11.30 a.m. The

day was fine and sunny, and the sensation of steaming for the French coast in company with troops was an unusual one. It was still difficult to realize that we were actually at war in Europe, and one felt as if what was taking place was nothing more than a dream. This curious sensation continued for a long time to assert itself more or less strongly, one's senses seemingly unwilling to accept realities and loth to grasp a fact which daily stared them in the face.

During the day, in our passage up Channel, we met and passed several British warships which were steaming in the direction of Portsmouth, clear evidence of the fact that no Germans were about ; although, with their superiority in destroyers, it would have been no easy matter, I imagine, to prevent a raid upon the ships carrying the Expeditionary Force. Night had closed in as we neared Boulogne Harbour, the approach to which was no longer marked by the fitful beams of the familiar lighthouse, which night after night had thrust themselves upon one's view when commanding at Shorncliffe. As we steamed slowly up the entrance to the port we were greeted by the cheers and "Vivent les Anglais !" of a goodly number of the inhabitants, to which the troops replied.

By 10.30 p.m. we were alongside the wharf. Soon the troops began to disembark, and marched to a camp on the high ground above the town near the Colonne de la Grande Armée, myself and staff remaining on board till morning. I then heard that the remainder of

my brigade had landed at Havre, whence they did not join me till the 24th.

After breakfasting on board I motored to the place where my troops were camped, and where, being a Sunday, they were pestered all day by the inhabitants to hand over as souvenirs their metal cap or shoulder badges. As the camp was an open one covering a considerable space, and some of the feminine element, who predominated and were not unattractive, were encouraged by the men, the regimental police had plenty of exercise in their endeavour to put a stop to what was, of course, a breach of military discipline. This passion for souvenirs followed us everywhere, and in spite of strict orders against parting with any portion of their uniform, I should say that a large percentage of the population of Northern France, more particularly of the seaports where our troops landed, managed to secure a metal memento of the British soldier. Later on, when we were retreating before the Germans and passing through a village, I was told that one of the Dublin Fusiliers in my brigade, who was wearily dragging himself along in the ranks of his company, hearing the too-familiar cry of "souvenir," turned an angry glance over his shoulder and growled, "Here, you can have my blooming pack for a souvenir!" My staff captain, Captain T. Frankland, who belonged to this regiment and was particularly skilful with his pen, sent a sketch of the incident to *Punch*, in whose pages it eventually figured.

One of my staff and I lunched with the Commandant of Boulogne, Colonel Comte Daru, grandson of Pierre Antoine, Comte de Daru, who was Intendant-General of Napoleon the First's Military Household, and held several other high offices under the Emperor. I had some interesting talk with him concerning his ancestor.

Everything in Boulogne looked much as usual, except for troops in khaki ; but that all was not going quite as well at the Front as was anticipated could be inferred from the scraps of news that reached our ears. German cavalry was reported to be already south of Ostend, while hostile motor-cyclists were stated to have been seen within ten miles of Boulogne itself. There were, however, to the north-east French Territorial troops along the bank of the River Aire, and I was informed that in case of necessity the troops I had with me and two battalions of the 12th Infantry Brigade were to assist in driving off the invaders. As the ground on the northern side of Boulogne was unfamiliar to me, I examined it from the top of the Column, whence an extensive view is obtainable, and later made a rapid reconnaissance by motor-car so as to arrive at a decision what it would be best to do in any circumstances that might arise.

But we were not to be required to make a lengthy stay in camp, and at midnight the troops were transported in several trains via Amiens and St. Quentin to Le Cateau, arriving there during the morning of the 24th of August. General Headquarters of the British



Expeditionary Force were then at Le Cateau, but the whereabouts of that Force was a matter of conjecture so far as the new arrivals were concerned. As battalion after battalion of my brigade came up by rail they moved north-westward along the broad cobbled Cambrai road, bordered like most French main routes by tall poplars, for a distance of about four miles to the vicinity of Beaumont and Inchy, south of which villages they bivouacked in some fields. I ascertained not long after that British cavalry under the Duke of York had successfully engaged French revolutionary mounted troops on this very ground over a century earlier.

About noon a friend of mine, on the Headquarters Staff, dashed up in a motor-car, and informed me that he was engaged in fixing upon a defensive position for our army which was to hold the ground from Le Cateau towards Cambrai. He told me, in confidence, that four French Army Corps had unwisely attacked a superior German force in the direction of Charleroi, and had been driven back with heavy loss; that the British troops which were also engaged had suffered severely, and, owing to the defeat of the French corps on their right, had been obliged to retreat. He added that the 3rd and 5th British Divisions—which for the first time since Waterloo had stood side by side in battle—were said to have suffered casualties amounting to some fifty per cent. of their strength, and that Valenciennes was in the hands of the Germans. My friend's news was not exactly of an exhilarating nature,

and I deemed it best to keep it to myself so as not to damp the high spirits of my brigade, the men of which were on such friendly terms with the inhabitants that despite precautions their bivouac was invaded here as at Boulogne. I was anxious to induce them to rest, for I knew that trying times were ahead and they had had little sleep since the 20th ; but they were too overcome by the novelty of finding themselves in a foreign country to settle down till darkness came, when there would be little enough time left for repose. I, however, consoled myself with the knowledge that I was by no means the first British commander who had found himself in the same situation, for I remembered how General Edward Paget, Moore's famous rearguard commander, had tried unavailingly to make his men take rest the day before the great retreat to Corunna began.

During the day I was employed in selecting a position for defence from La Sotière to Caudry and beyond, and later was sent for to General Headquarters ; but on arriving there and finding that I was not required, I quickly returned to my troops.

I took up my quarters at the Beaumont Brewery, where the proprietress put some questions to me regarding the prospects of the Allies, and while expressing her satisfaction at the arrival of the British troops, showed some anxiety as to the future. Feeling that nothing that I might say to her could now reach the ears of my own men, I disclosed a portion of the news

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I had gathered during the day regarding the general situation, and when asked for advice as to what course should be pursued in case we had to fall back, recommended that she should remain where she was for the present. I think her anxiety must have reacted on myself, for on retiring, as I hoped, to rest the slight sense of depression which I felt at the somewhat inauspicious opening of the campaign did not diminish, and sleep firmly declined to give me a few hours of oblivion.

I was up at 1.10 a.m., on the 25th, and the brigade marched northwards at 2 a.m., via Viesly, in the direction of St. Python, a village situated on the right bank of the River Selle, near Solesmes, which we reached at 4.30 a.m. After placing outposts I sent for Lieutenant Wasey of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment—who had proved himself with the brigade at peace manœuvres to be an exceptionally good and resourceful scout, and now and later was to demonstrate that fact in war—and told him to take a couple of cyclists and push forward towards Valenciennes, from which direction the sound of guns was audible, and bring back such news as he could get of the situation. I then rode to divisional headquarters, which were in a cottage at Briastre, where the other brigade commanders had already arrived, and was given, doubtless owing to the general lack of information, some not very definite orders.

Returning to my brigade, which was on the extreme

left of the Allied armies, I decided to withdraw to some more favourable ground near the farm of Fontaine-sur-Terte, where, in conjunction with the remainder of the 4th Division, I was to assist in covering the retirement of the 3rd and 5th British Divisions. Here we remained all day holding the entrenchments which we had dug in the morning and seeing little of the retreating army, most of which fell back through the next brigade on my right.

A few men of the Gordon Highlanders, my old regiment, which formed part of the 3rd Division, passed our way looking exceedingly tired. They had been engaged at Mons and told me the names of some of the officers who had fallen ; and from their account it was evident that the forces in front of us were considerably more numerous than our own.

A couple of planes passed overhead, and in the afternoon some shells came whizzing over the farm, causing some casualties among the Seaforth Highlanders, who were busily digging trenches in a beetroot field. As far as I could judge, there seemed to be nothing in front of us but cavalry and horse artillery, which showed signs of working round my left or western flank, and obliged me to throw out the Royal Irish Fusiliers three-quarters of a mile to the north-west of Viesly, to secure the brigade from molestation from the direction of Quievy. As night closed in the Prussian cavalry grew bolder, pushing patrols from time to time towards the farm. On each occasion some of my men,

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who were lying in ambush on either side of the road, allowed them to come near and then fired heavily into them, and one could hear the clatter of galloping horses as those who were not struck down escaped. The game was one which the troops quite enjoyed, their interest in this, their first experience of trying their weapons on an enemy, being stimulated by securing a trooper of the 11th Uhlans, who died of wounds, and a couple of quite good-looking horses. The careless, noisy manner in which these patrols approached afforded a good measure of the value of the German cavalry in such work, though doubtless the somewhat precipitous retreat of the British Expeditionary Force was responsible for the audacious, not to say foolhardy, manner in which they pushed southward.

Orders now came for me to retire my brigade to Haucourt, a village which lay some eight miles to the south-east, and battalion after battalion moved off, the rearguard—the Seaforth Highlanders—slipping quietly away shortly after driving off a hostile mounted patrol.

The process of withdrawal, carried out in the dark, had been a slow one, and it was a relief to my feelings when the last company of the Highlanders, which I accompanied, left the vicinity of the farm unmolested.

My troops formed the rearguard of the division and marched through Viesly and Bethencourt. At the latter place a cavalry staff officer accosted me as I rode through the main street and inquired whether the

village, in my opinion, would be a safe place for his brigade to remain in during the night. I told him that so far as I knew there were no troops behind me except hostile ones, on which he remarked that it was evidently advisable to get clear of the village without loss of time, a conclusion with which I cordially agreed. We continued our march to Beauvais, where I met the divisional commander, General Snow, who told me that I was to go on in advance of the 11th Infantry Brigade, which, with the 12th Infantry Brigade (the two other brigades of the division), was to hold an outpost position about three miles south of and parallel to the Le Cateau-Cambrai road. For some reason it was necessary to reverse the direction of march of my brigade in the middle of the village—the streets of which seemed particularly narrow—which was crowded with troops and transport, and it took no inconsiderable time and some friction to get clear and once more under way. Matters were not assisted by the fact that the night was inky dark, though it is true that to our rear the lurid glare of burning farms and haystacks shed a fitful light upon the scene.

The road which it had been intended we should follow to our destination was reported to be impassable, on account of rain which had fallen heavily for a short time during the afternoon; but, after searching, another route was found which promised to take us in the required direction. At length, about 3.40 a.m., we arrived at a village, the name of which could not

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be ascertained, as not a soul was to be seen. The divisional general, who had shared my road-hunting operations, and who had no more idea than I had where we were, now rode off, no doubt to try and find his other troops, and at daylight the problem was solved when the name of the village, Cattenières, was discovered on a board inside the railway station. My peace of mind was somewhat disturbed as soon as it was light enough to consult a map, when I discovered that we were still two miles north of Haucourt and half that distance on the German side of the position, which I knew the 11th and 12th Brigades had been ordered to hold with outposts. The whole of the first line transport of my brigade had been placed for safety at the head of the column during the night march, and as gaps are easily created on such occasions I was horrified, though not exactly surprised, when riding back a short way at daylight to find no signs of the infantry. I had ordered the horses to be watered, wood to be collected, fires lighted and kettles boiled, soon after reaching Cattenières, as I knew that the infantry when they came up would be exhausted by their tedious tramp, and hoped to have tea ready for them. But no signs of troops were visible, and a cyclist orderly who had ridden back for some distance along our tracks returned with the report that nothing was coming along the road behind us.

About 5.15 a.m. some shots were audible from the direction in which I supposed our outposts were—not

immediately behind the village we had reached, but rather to the south-east. It was difficult to account for this firing, as there were no hostile signs in our immediate neighbourhood, and for a moment I was tempted to wait a little longer in the hope of my infantry coming up. But a presentiment of approaching danger, coupled with the sound of the firing that had been heard, led me to order the horses to be hooked in, the boiling water to be thrown on the fires so as to hide the telltale smoke, and the convoy to move southwards to Haucourt without losing a moment.

Riding on a little in advance to make sure of the road, it did not reach my ears till some time later that the tail of the transport had been fired into shortly after it had cleared the village. It seems that Uhlans accompanied by machine-guns on motor-cars were following close upon our heels, and that the order to leave Cattenières had not been given a moment too soon. Indeed, had they arrived a few minutes earlier it is difficult to see how we could, almost defenceless as we were, and with a narrow railway bridge in our rear, have extricated ourselves from the very awkward situation in which we should have found ourselves placed.

As I rode up the ridge which overlooks Haucourt from the north, I found the outposts of the 12th Infantry Brigade engaged in digging a trench in a beetroot field some way down the forward slope. I went on to the village and at the Mairie found General



Snow, who told me that my brigade had shortly before arrived, having lost touch of the transport near Beauvais owing to the pace at which it was moving. He desired me to come with him in his motor-car and look at the position which he proposed to hold ; for Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, to whose Army Corps—the Second—the 4th Division was attached, had decided that he must stand and fight, as his own divisions—the 3rd and 5th—were too exhausted to march further.

General Snow and I had gone but a short distance when heavy rifle fire was opened apparently from the north upon the troops on the ridge, for bullets came flying over Haucourt village. What was taking place was that the German advanced guard, composed as I have mentioned chiefly of cavalry and machine-guns carried on motor-cars, had surprised our outposts and the troops which they were covering, and, taking them at a disadvantage, was driving them off the greater part of the ridge. A brigade of our 18-pounders now came up and took position on the ground near where the divisional general and myself, having left the motor-car on the road close by, were standing.

As the firing still continued and I was anxious to ascertain the whereabouts of my brigade, I asked leave to return to Haucourt, which I did on foot, and found in rear of the village the Seaforth Highlanders and Royal Irish Fusiliers. My other two battalions were not present ; one of them, the 1st Bn. Royal Warwick-

shire Regiment, which, like the rest, had on reaching Haucourt before daylight bivouacked east of the village, had become involved in an effort to retake the ridge which the Germans had in part succeeded in occupying. This battalion made a gallant attack and lost heavily, both in officers and men, and portions of it held the ground which it had gained until a general retirement was ordered during the afternoon. I could not at first ascertain the whereabouts of my remaining battalion—the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers—but later found two companies under Major Shewan holding the high ground immediately east of the village. Unfortunately when the Germans attacked our outposts my brigade signal section had, in my absence, been thrown into the fight to maintain the ridge, and the greater number were either killed or wounded. The ground, too, after the rain of the previous day was very heavy, and the horses of my staff and orderlies were too exhausted to move beyond a walk. The result was that practically all means of maintaining communication between headquarters of the brigade and its several battalions were at an end, and no little inconvenience was caused. Indeed, not only was I out of touch with the headquarters of the division most of the day, but I failed, after repeated efforts, to find the commander of either the 1st Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment or the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

After a time I was ordered to send a battalion to the

left, as there were signs that the Germans were trying to work round our outer flank from the direction of Cambrai, my brigade being still on the extreme left flank of the Allied forces. The 1st Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers moved off in the required direction, and an hour later the 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders was despatched to take up a position in echelon to the former battalion, so as to guarantee the division from a still wider out-flanking movement on the part of the Germans. All the guns of the division appeared to be in action, and so effectively did they fire that the German infantry, although in possession of the high ground north of Haucourt, from which they overlooked our position, did not dare to push forward and occupy that village until nightfall. Indeed, during the afternoon, under cover of our guns, part of the 12th Infantry Brigade passed through the left of my front, and pushing forward to the ridge north of Haucourt, whence they had been driven in the morning, succeeded in bringing back some of the wounded whom they had been obliged to leave behind.

The very wide front which my troops were holding obliged me to move about to keep touch with the situation. Part of the day I passed in the vicinity of my two battalions near Haucourt, coming in for a very heavy dose of shrapnel fire in the open, which continued at intervals for about one and a half hours, most of the shells bursting either high or on graze. These attentions on the part of the German artillery were probably

due to the proximity of our own guns, which, though under no kind of cover, seemed to bear charmed lives. During this storm of shell the 29th Brigade R.F.A., under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Stockdale, which was co-operating with my troops, was withdrawn to a position in rear, and though the shrapnel were bursting all round the batteries they escaped with little or no loss in men and horses.

I was glad to see that my men, who with few exceptions were under fire for the first time in their lives, bore the ordeal stoutly, though some, more especially one Irishman who appeared to be hit and kept shouting that he was murdered, were rather overcome. My staff captain, Captain T. Frankland, whose regiment was being made a target by the German guns and was suffering casualties, went off to help in steadying them, and then proceeded to make a final effort to get into communication with my two battalion commanders on the right. This had become more than ever important, as my guns were now in a retired position, and I had noticed a considerable portion of our infantry, which was holding ground further east, moving rearwards in the direction of Ligny. Moreover it was becoming evident that the Germans, no doubt having noted the withdrawal of guns, were growing bolder, and I was anxious to be in a position to send orders without delay should a retirement be ordered by the divisional commander.

The Germans were still busy firing shrapnel when I

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rode to Selvigny and rejoined my brigade-major, at which place my headquarters had been established for several hours. The two battalions of my brigade which had been sent to protect the left flank of the division had meanwhile entrenched themselves and had sufficed to prevent the enemy from carrying out any successful enterprise in their direction. Battery after battery was withdrawing through Selvigny, the Germans firing on them with redoubled activity and the shells bursting every moment in close proximity to the teams. But nothing could disturb the equanimity of their commander, Lieutenant-Colonel C. M. Ross-Johnson, who warmly reproved one of his subordinates for allowing his horses to move quicker than a trot.

I believe the order to retire was sent out shortly after 3.30 p.m., when the 5th Division, which had borne the brunt of the attack, was in imminent danger of being enveloped, a situation which would have imperilled the safety of the 3rd and 4th Divisions on its left. The order reached me a few minutes before 5 p.m., and directed me to cover the withdrawal of the division, moving my rearguard by the valley between Caullery and Selvigny and taking up position on some high ground south-east of the Bois du Gard—that is to say, about two miles south-east of Selvigny. A battery was to be attached to me and was directed to move to a point east of the village of Déheries; but its commander, Major Short, informed me that he had orders to move eventually from that place and fall back along

a route running in a south-westerly direction. His instructions did not appear to tally with mine, but as my brigade-major had heard that divisional headquarters were to be established at Malincourt, I felt no doubt that I should either be informed or ascertain on inquiry what further action would be required of me.

I had, before leaving the vicinity of my two battalions on the right, observed what appeared to be them conforming to a rearward movement of the 11th Infantry Brigade, and as I had not succeeded in getting into communication with them nor received any reports throughout the day, I trusted that their commanders would succeed in withdrawing them in safety. From accounts which reached me later it seems that some remnants were still holding Haucourt under the command of Major Shewan, Royal Dublin Fusiliers. As night fell the Germans cautiously made their way into that village from the north, whereupon Shewan quietly withdrew his men from it in the opposite direction. After wandering about in the dark for some hours his party seems to have reached the neighbourhood of Ligny, which the Germans had already occupied. What exactly occurred there is doubtful, but after a short, sharp fight some were surrounded and taken, while others, under Captain N. P. Clarke of the same regiment, after several adventurous days and nights, managed to march through the advancing Germans to the coast, whence they were shipped to England, rejoining the brigade in October. Shewan himself, a

gallant and determined officer, was taken prisoner, and his services were consequently lost to the British Army throughout the war. His holding on to Haucourt, however, must have helped to conceal the fact of the withdrawal of the main body, and probably prevented the Germans from pushing on as rapidly as otherwise they might have done.

The time had now come for me to retire, as the troops were assembled and ready to carry out the movement ordered, so sending for my horse, which I had left close by in Selvigny, in a building which guaranteed comparative safety from the German shrapnel, I mounted and rode to join my two battalions. Shortly before this I had noticed that on the ground near where an artillery brigade had been in action there were several horses more or less badly wounded. Humanity demanded that they should be put out of pain as speedily as possible, so calling to a farrier-sergeant to take my revolver, I directed him to terminate their misery.

It was now about 6 p.m., and the whole of the artillery having fallen back, the Seaforth Highlanders and Royal Irish Fusiliers, which were to form the rear-guard, began retiring. The route which I had been given unfortunately exposed them to fire, causing them to march at first to a flank over ground where an artillery brigade of ours had been posted all day ; and in consequence each company as it passed over the ridge received a shower of shrapnel. Then, as they

disappeared from view, the enemy lengthened the range of his guns and searched with fire the ground in rear. At this point we had a number of casualties, but the men of the Seaforth Highlanders, with whom I rode and who were the last to cross the ridge, maintained good order in spite of the accurate fire which relentlessly pursued their march. And here I should mention that the 4th Division had been sent up to assist the remainder of the Expeditionary Force before it had been completed in many requisites, and amongst the most important items that were lacking were its three field ambulances. Consequently, as soon as our battalion stretchers were full, no wounded man who was unable to walk could be carried from the field. To make matters worse, one company of the Seaforth Highlanders, with which many of the stretchers of the battalion somehow happened to be, retired through Selvigny, following a route which I had reconnoitred earlier in the day, and which I should have preferred to use had my orders not directed me to take another. This company suffered little loss and did not rejoin us until the afternoon of the following day.

As soon as we were clear of the area which was being shelled, we marched along a track which was hidden from the view of the enemy, and, crossing a light railway, came to what appeared to be the position we had been ordered to hold. It was now dark and rain had begun to fall, and although I had doubts whether we had retired quite as far as was intended, I decided



to halt. The map which had been issued to us did not, by the light of my electric torch, show the features of the ground at all clearly, and the position we had reached seemed to possess some advantages from a defensive point of view. The two battalions with me were allotted bivouacs, and piquets were thrown out a short distance towards the lately-quitted battlefield.

I should perhaps explain that throughout the day I had been without any information as to the general course of affairs, and though it crossed my mind that the main body of the division might be making a night march in order to draw clear of the Germans, I had no definite knowledge that such was actually in progress, and did not feel justified in moving further in a rearward direction than was laid down in my orders. I, however, despatched my brigade-major, the only officer of my staff now with me, to Malincourt, to find out from the division what further action was required of me, and having done so, walked round the battalion bivouacs and outposts.

I had sent my horse and orderly to the farm of Hurtevent close by, where the troops later drew water and where I managed to secure a tumbler of milk—the only sustenance that had passed my lips for many hours. I then wandered up and down in the darkness anxiously awaiting the return of my staff officer from Malincourt. Eight, nine, ten o'clock went by, but not a sign of him could be heard or seen. The night was very dark, but in the direction of Haucourt the flames

of a burning haystack or farm threw around a ruddy glare, and from time to time moving figures seemed to appear and then vanish into the surrounding darkness.

Shortly before eleven o'clock a man from the village of Clary, which lay a little more than a mile to my right front as I faced towards the enemy, was brought to me. He was in a somewhat excited condition and stated that German infantry—whose dress he correctly described—had entered the village and taken up their quarters for the night. His own house had been broken into and himself seized, but he had succeeded in escaping. My position was evidently one of doubtful security, but rest for the men was essential and there was nothing to be done but wait till daylight or the arrival of my staff officer. As time went on and there were no signs of his return, I collected some corn sheaves to serve as a bed, and covering myself from the rain with my waterproof coat, lay down beside a piquet of the Seaforth Highlanders. The sentry, who was close at hand, I directed to call me when he was relieved at 2 a.m., until which hour I slept soundly.

At 3 a.m., when the troops stood to arms, the rain had ceased and a faint mist hung over the sodden fields. I now despatched a man for my horse, and as we had some twenty wounded with us who were unfit to march, I was obliged with the utmost reluctance to have them carried to the farm, where they were given over to the care of the occupants, and no doubt fell into the hands of the Germans before many hours had passed.

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As day began to dawn, I moved my two battalions to more favourable ground in rear, and meeting some inhabitants coming from the direction of Elincourt, inquired of them if any troops were there. They answered my question in the negative. A few minutes later a motor-car passed towards that place within a couple of hundred yards of the ground where my troops were halted. There can be no question but that this was a German car, and the occupants, if they saw us in the uncertain light, must have taken us for their own troops.

It was now evident that the rearguard had been left in the lurch or, as I ascertained later, an order which should have been given to me did not arrive. As I had no staff officer with me, I borrowed Captain Hon. Eric Campbell, the adjutant of the Seaforth Highlanders, and sent him to Malincourt to inquire if there were any troops there and what had become of those who had been there the night before. At a quarter to six, it now being broad daylight, he returned and stated that the inhabitants had informed him that the last of the British troops had left the village at midnight on the 26th, and had marched off in a south-westerly direction. It was clear, therefore, that, as we were distant about two miles from Malincourt, our main column had seven hours' start of us ; and as the sun had been up for some time, the Germans, who presumably were following and had been in close proximity all the previous night, could not be far off. There were, however, no signs of them,

so far as could be seen by scanning the horizon with one's field-glasses, and one could comfort oneself with the probability that after their lengthy marches and the action of the previous day they might not feel inclined for an early start.

In order that there should be no doubt as to my intentions, I called up my two battalion commanders and after giving them my views on the situation, told them that it was a case of marching hard or fighting to a finish, for having been taken prisoner earlier in my career, I had no intention of repeating the experience. I then started my little column on the track to Malincourt, the Irish Fusiliers leading, the Seaforth Highlanders following and forming the rearguard. The men were tired and hungry, and many of them were foot-sore, but the determined look on the faces of the Highlanders showed that they would either tramp along to safety or leave their mark on anyone who should attempt to interfere with their retreat.

After consulting Sir Evelyn Bradford, the commanding officer of the Seaforth Highlanders, I decided that it would be best to omit the usual hourly halts of ten minutes and cover a good stretch before giving the men any pause for rest.

Our route, which I ascertained by questioning the inhabitants of the villages through which we passed as to the direction which the main column had taken, lay through Malincourt—Villiers-Outréaux—Aubenchueil to Gouy.

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As we approached each place, the inhabitants, who, in spite of the early hour, seemed very much on the alert, came out to meet us, many volunteering information regarding Uhlans who were stated to be in the vicinity, while others, who had evidently mistaken the main body of the 4th Division for Germans, would have had us believe that there was hostile infantry already ahead of us. As at other places through which we had passed since landing in France, the attentions of these villagers became embarrassing, for, crowding into the street, they kept pressing upon the men, with inconvenient generosity, water, wine, bread, and apples. The temptation to the thirsty soldiers was great, and such difficulty had I in making some of them keep their ranks, that I was forced to draw my revolver from its case and threaten to use it, for the least delay in our march was an added danger, and it was of vital importance that the discipline of the column should be maintained. I can vividly recall the look of astonishment and dismay on the face of a well-meaning French matron when I swept from a window-sill on to the pavement some dozen tumblers of red wine which, displayed thereon, were tempting the men to break their ranks as they marched by. So troublesome did these villagers at length become that as we neared each inhabited place I rode ahead and ordered them to go into their houses and shut their doors until the troops had passed. In some cases, where my explanation that British troops were forbidden to accept anything on the

march passed unheeded, I was obliged to threaten to burn their roofs over their heads, a procedure which I need hardly say I had not the least intention of putting into execution. But it was no time for mincing matters, and every moment might mean that the German cavalry and armoured motor-cars were drawing nearer.

We had now been marching for some two and a half hours without halting, and it was imperative to water the men, for the small supply carried by them had long before been consumed. I therefore rode on in advance to the village of Gouy, where I persuaded the inhabitants to bring into the street every tub, bucket, or vessel which they possessed, and these, as far as possible, were filled before my thirsty following arrived. Half an hour was spent at the village, the men after quenching their thirst lying down full length on the road; and here I ascertained that the main column of the 4th Division, whose tracks we were still following, had pursued its march to Vendhuile, where the headquarters had been the previous night.

There appeared to be two roads to that place, which lies nearly due west of Gouy. Both of these lead through a defile, one north and one south of the Canal du Nord, which near Vendhuile runs through a tunnel several miles in length. As to the north I heard what sounded like the noise of guns in action, I thought it would be wiser to follow that route, which would put the canal between my troops and any hostile force.

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Taking from the village a guide who, like every French inhabitant I have encountered, knew all about the roads in the vicinity of his home and could state with precision whither they led and the distance of the neighbouring villages, we started on our tramp again.

As we entered Vendhuile I saw sitting on the road-side two British stragglers, who told me that the 4th Division had cleared the village at 8 a.m., and had marched in a southerly direction.

It was now 10 a.m., so I knew that we had gained about five hours on the main column, though the fact that we had not yet run into our cavalry showed that it was necessary to push on. As I arrived at the centre of the village, a motor-car from the south drew up, and on approaching it the occupant, an officer of the Army Service Corps, asked me if I could tell him where General Allenby, the commander of our Cavalry Corps, was. He was searching for the general with a view to ascertaining his wishes regarding the delivery of supplies for his force. I told the officer that if he continued in the direction in which he was going he would shortly meet the Germans and not the general, but that, as I too was anxious to find the cavalry, I would come with him in his car and help him in his researches.

Giving my horse to my orderly to lead, and directing the troops to follow southward, I drove off in the car in that direction, and at Le Tombeau farm, a mile and a half further on, came up with Colonel Cook and Major

Trotter of the Household Cavalry. Their regiment was on the point of retiring, but no sooner had I explained the situation than Cook said that he would wait where he was till my infantry came up, and despatched an orderly to report our arrival to the Cavalry Corps Commander, who sent back some mounted troops to reoccupy Vendhuile. I then motored back to my battalions and led them amidst a downpour of rain by a track across fields to Ronsoy, as the Germans were stated to be bringing up guns and the main road through Lempire was very much exposed to view.

I passed General Allenby's headquarters at the roadside, and he gave me a hard-boiled egg and some biscuits, which I gladly accepted, as I had eaten nothing for nearly twenty hours. His staff officer, Colonel John Vaughan, at once most kindly despatched a motor-car with instructions to bring up motor-lorries with supplies for the men, which he arranged should meet us somewhere on the road we were pursuing.

We now marched on through Templeux-le-Guérard, and, on approaching Roisel, saw preparations being made to receive an attack. Here I came up with some of the 4th Division Staff, who had given us up for lost and were not a little pleased to have us back in the fold.

After a short halt, during which the men and I got some food, the march was resumed to Hancourt, to the north of which on some high ground about half of the division and some artillery appeared to be collected.



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Here I met the divisional commander, who was relieved to see again myself and my brigade, and found the company of Seaforth Highlanders which had gone astray on the previous night, and sufficient remnants of my other two units to form a composite battalion. Trenches were being dug with vigour in the beet-root fields, this time on the reverse slope of the hill.

Leaving my two weary battalions in reserve, I was directed to take charge of a portion of the frontage which was to be held. As I had been following at a distance of some six hours' march behind the division, and had not seen a single German infantryman, the preparations for defence struck me as being somewhat unnecessary, more especially so when it came to my knowledge that the retreat was to be continued at nightfall. But there seemed to be a good deal of uncertainty, not to say anxiety, regarding the enemy's movements at this time, an example of which we had in the afternoon when we were suddenly told that the Germans were in a village only 1,500 yards away ! I was hastily told to man the edge of Hancourt village with my weary battalions and hold the houses to the last. A few minutes passed and my dispositions had been made when a message came to say that the supposed Germans were our own cavalry under Brigadier-General Hon. Cecil Bingham, and that the troops could fall out and rest again.

I was next informed that if an attack were not made

by 6 p.m., I was to move the Seaforth Highlanders and Royal Irish Fusiliers to Vraignes, where as many as possible were to be put on the limbers and wagons of the 14th Artillery Brigade preparatory to a night march of the whole division to Voyennes. Many of the men were so exhausted and footsore that only with the help of artillery vehicles and country carts was it possible to move them over the eleven miles to their destination.

I shall never forget this night march. It was the fifth night I had passed without sleep, except for some three hours, and as I found that to keep awake on horseback was impossible and would only lead to tumbling off, I was forced to tramp along on foot. I was leading the whole column, too, and to maintain a sufficiently slow pace when mounted was out of the question. We started off at 9 p.m. and passed through Tertry, Monchy-Lagache, Guizancourt, Croix, and Matigny. The arrangements made for this march by the divisional staff officer responsible were admirable. Every side road had been blocked by sending men in advance, so as to preclude the possibility of our losing the proper direction in the dark, and in addition a staff officer handed over to me a fresh guide at each village to which we came. There was, therefore, no difficulty in leading the column, the only trouble being to keep awake, and time after time during the weary hours of march did I find myself asleep and walking into the ditches and fields that bordered the road. At every

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halt, too, the men were so exhausted that no sooner had they thrown themselves on the ground, than they were fast asleep and many snoring loudly. To wake them up and start the march again involved some exertions on the part of officers and non-commissioned officers, for the British soldier is at any time a heavy sleeper, and when really tired possesses an abnormal power of keeping in a state of dormancy despite disturbing elements that would rouse the ordinary man at once.

At one place where we halted some time before midnight a number of country carts, which had been obtained by requisition, were standing at the roadside and were intended to carry those of the men who were least able to walk the remainder of the distance which we had to cover. To select the men at any time would have been difficult, and in the dark it was impossible. Indeed, long before the attempted selection could be made, I found the wagons swarming with humanity, for like some dogs who will bound into a railway carriage and under the seat if taken to a station, the temptation proved too much for the leading battalion, who monopolized every inch of space with the greatest avidity.

One curious feature of this night march was that we seemed to be traversing a country the reverse of level, and some of the hills we descended appeared to be so steep that I thought the heavy wagons carrying the troops would come to grief. Yet later on, on con-

sulting a map, I found that, far from being a hilly region, the country was generally flat.

About 3.30 a.m. we crossed over the River Somme by a stone bridge and reached Voyennes, where my brigade-major, who it will be remembered I had lost on the previous night, rejoined me. After leaving me he had gone to Malincourt, and found that divisional headquarters were no longer there, but that masses of troops, including some of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers under Lieutenant-Colonel Mainwaring, were passing through in their march to the south-west. He returned towards our bivouac and tried for some time to find me, but failed to do so in the dark, so he made his way to St. Quentin and thence to Voyennes by Ham. He had procured for me what I wanted most of all, a bed, albeit in an evil-looking estaminet (La Maison Rouge); but I was in no mood to be particular, and in a few minutes my clothes were off and I was fast asleep.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RETREAT (*Continued*)

MY rest proved all too short, for at 6 a.m. (28th August) my servant called me and told me that we were to move again in an hour. After making a hasty toilet and swallowing some breakfast, I rode with my brigade-major to divisional headquarters, whither I had been summoned, there to be informed that I must form the advanced guard of the division and move to Canizy. As I was about to leave in order to set my brigade in motion, I was told that according to higher orders all officers' baggage was to be thrown off the wagons, and I think it was suggested that it should be burnt so as to prevent it falling into the enemy's hands! The ostensible reason for this order was that the empty vehicles would be required to transport those men who were too fatigued to march. The baggage of the headquarters of the brigade somehow escaped this treatment, and having with me a certain number of surplus garments, I was able to supply a few of the most pressing needs of others.

At 7.30 a.m. we were under way, and marched as advanced guard of the division to Canizy, where we halted for some time. The situation appeared to be

what in military parlance is called "obscure." Apparently the 3rd Division was retiring on a line parallel to ours, but a short distance to the east, and we may have been somewhat in advance and were waiting until its troops were abreast of ours.

In case of unexpected eventualities I took up a position along the embankment of the railway which runs parallel to the Somme Canal. In front of us to the north the view was restricted by the tall poplars and other trees which border the canal, and had the enemy crossed to the south bank, he would have had to attack us over open ground exposed to our guns and unsupported by his own. However, there was to be no attack, and I verily believe that by this time the Germans had ceased to pursue us closely except for a few squadrons of Uhlans, some horse artillery and machine-guns.

At length I was told that my brigade was no longer advanced guard, but had become rearguard, whereupon I sent off my staff captain to requisition as many country carts as he could find, in order that any man who was unfit to march might not have to be left behind.

We withdrew to Esmerly-Hallon, where I shared the lunch—omelette and red wine—of the divisional staff in a farmhouse and got water and a little food for the men. About 2 p.m. we resumed our march, passing Bonnene Château, which appeared to be deserted, except for some vociferous fox-terriers, and thence by a grass

track continued to Flavy-le-Meldeux, where, after a good deal of talking, the country carts at a farm were requisitioned for those who could walk no further. At this village I came across a party of the 9th Lancers, who, I think, intended to pass the night there and screen the infantry of our column.

We next moved through Tirlancourt, Béthancourt to Muirancourt, my only recollections of which are that my brigade-major had his forage-cap stolen while we sat in an inn eating a not very appetizing meal of stewed guinea-fowl.

About midnight we reached Bussy, where the men, who had had next to nothing to eat all day, got food from a motor-lorry supply column which came up at a most opportune moment and deposited along the roadside the provender which it carried. As soon as the battalions were settled in bivouac, I adjourned to my night quarters, which my orderly officer had found after much hunting up and down the village, for the houses were either deserted or locked up for the night. Our hostess, a motherly old cottager, kindly made us some coffee, and I went to bed between 2 and 3 a.m.

I was up at 6 a.m. on the 29th, and an hour later was told that the divisional commander was outside and wished to see me. He said that the enemy was reported to be coming up in force, and ordered me at once to hold certain positions with strong outposts. The report proved to be exaggerated, and though a few Uhlans later appeared on the scene and some rounds

from guns were fired towards Crisolles, the day passed quietly.

During the morning a British monoplane pursuing a German biplane flew overhead. The skilful manœuvring of the former, which from time to time fired with rifle or revolver at the pilot of the larger machine and drove him back to his own lines, was a pretty sight to witness, and reminded one of a fight between two birds of prey. The several village pumps were kept hard at work all day, for since we left Boulogne the men had had no chance of performing their ablutions.

In the afternoon I rode out to look at my outpost position, the right of which was in touch with the 3rd Division at Crisolles, my left extending to about Cendrière, where it communicated with the 12th Infantry Brigade at Chévilley.

At 6 p.m. a car arrived with an order for me to go to divisional headquarters, which were in a prettily situated château near Beaurains. There I was ordered again to act as rearguard of the division, which was to make a night march ; but as it was thought that the retreat might not be carried out beyond a certain point, I was directed to be prepared to occupy a position in the neighbourhood of Beaurains.

I returned to my headquarters, noting on the way the features of the ground over which we quickly passed, and then dictated orders for withdrawing the outposts and moving back in the required direction.



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I sent to the 3rd Division on my right intimating that I had been ordered to retire not earlier than 8.30 p.m., and requested them to arrange to keep their rearguard level with mine, as I also proposed to do with theirs. I received no reply, and when later I found that that division had retired and left my right exposed I sent a party to Crisolles to secure myself in that direction.

At 9 p.m. my brigade began moving off, but owing to some misunderstanding of my orders or difficulty in collecting in the dark the troops on outpost duty, the last battalion did not clear Bussy till 11 p.m. The Germans were showing no signs of movement, and as the distance which we had to go before halting was not great, the delay was not of any consequence.

We made for Beaurains as ordered, on approaching which place I found that an outpost company of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, which had been ordered to follow the rearguard of the 12th Infantry Brigade and thereafter guard an important road fork a quarter of a mile north of Sermaize, was missing. I ordered the brigade to march to its halting-place, and rode back for some distance along the road to Bussy and along that leading to Chévilly, but not a soul was to be seen. The company had evidently lost its way or somehow been left behind. I therefore posted in its place the divisional cyclist company, under Captain E. V. M. Shelley, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, which had joined the division on the previous day and was attached to my

brigade, and left instructions that a search for the missing company was to be made.

At Beaurains, which the brigade reached soon after midnight, Major A. A. Montgomery, a staff officer of the division, arrived with orders to the effect that I was to be across the River Oise at Pont l'Evêque with my brigade by 6 a.m. I was further directed to instruct the engineer officer at the latter place to blow up the bridges, which were being prepared for demolition. As there would be little time for rest, I decided not to occupy the château, and lay down by the roadside, using my saddle as a pillow and a horse blanket as a covering. The night was cold, but I slept soundly until 4 a.m., when as it was getting near the time for us to march, I rode to the cyclist piquet and found that the missing company of the Royal Irish Fusiliers had not been found. I now ordered patrols to be sent out again to search along the Bussy, Chévilley, and other roads, and bring the company with them, and moved the brigade through the outskirts of Noyon towards the river, which was reached about 6 a.m.

At the point where we were to cross it and where the bridges were to be destroyed the village of Pont l'Evêque consists of a main street, which has a sharp bend in it about one hundred yards from the river on the north bank, a fact which would be favourable to troops who might try to capture the northern bridge by a coup de main. I therefore decided to keep the Royal Irish Fusiliers with me on the right or northern bank,

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while waiting for the cyclists to rejoin, and sent the remainder of the brigade across the river, the three bridges of which were ready to be blown up and the approaches to which were in some degree covered by machine-guns.

At 7 a.m., an hour after the time at which I was ordered to destroy the river passages, the cyclist company arrived and a young officer who had patrolled as far as Bussy, which had been my headquarters all the previous day, informed me that he had found there the company of the Irish Fusiliers. The officer in command, he said, had told him that he was in touch with the headquarters of his battalion—which, however, was then with me at Pont l'Evêque, and which was innocent of any knowledge of his whereabouts !

My orders for the company to withdraw and rejoin me had not been delivered, and Bussy, where it was reported to be, was five miles from the river ; while the enemy, who had been in close touch with us all the previous day, had now had several hours of daylight in which to dispose of so weak a force. The prospect of rescuing it seemed rather doubtful, and the attempt to do so might endanger the safety of the rearguard, for it was now one hour past the time at which I had been ordered to destroy the bridges, and that time had no doubt been fixed to coincide with demolition work of a similar nature elsewhere on the river. If, therefore, I remained at Pont l'Evêque, and should the enemy happen to effect a passage on either of my flanks, I

might shortly find a hostile force between the rear-guard and the main body of the division. I was loth, however, to leave any portion of the brigade behind, and experience had shown me that hostile troops rarely march as quickly as anticipated, and it was possible that this day again the Germans might be dilatory in moving forward from their quarters of the previous night. I decided, therefore, to accept the risk, and gave the cyclist company commander orders to go back and bring the defaulting company ; while, to secure in some degree his retreat, I posted detachments of infantry for some distance along the road towards Bussy. At the same time I informed the division by cable telegraph that my passage of the river and the destruction of the bridges would be delayed for some hours.

While waiting at Pont l'Evêque an aged inhabitant, who told me that she lived alone in her cottage and had a son fighting who had already been decorated for bravery, kindly made me a cup of coffee and gave me an excellent pear, and inquired what she had better do when the Germans came. As I did not then know of the fiendish acts which had been committed by them in Belgium on peaceful inhabitants of all ages and both sexes, I advised her to remain at her house and supply their demands as well as she could.

I think it was while sitting in her cottage that I happened to look at my map and saw that I was only some four miles from the Château de Cuts, where some

## 48 A BRIGADE OF THE OLD ARMY

eighteen months earlier I had had a capital day's pheasant-shooting, at which the majority of the guns were skilfully handled by French ladies. As it seemed possible that my hostess might still be there, my inclination was to send and warn her that the Germans would certainly reach her house by nightfall. But after a moment's reflection I changed my mind, for I had parted with my cyclists, one of whom at least would be necessary to carry a message, and it seemed probable that British troops must have already passed the château, and that the coming storm would have been sufficiently advertised. That it proved to be rather an unpleasant storm I heard later, for it seems that the Germans not only removed all valuables and wrecked the place, but felled all the fine trees in the surrounding woods.

At 10.15 a.m. the Irish Fusilier company arrived, shortly followed by the cyclists, who had had a skirmish with Uhlans, but had completed their mission with the loss of only one man, whose bicycle had been damaged by a bullet and who had missed his way. He rejoined the company three weeks later, meantime keeping hidden in the woods and being fed by the French peasants. On his return he had a curious experience to relate, for during the time that he was absent from his unit he saw the Germans advance and then retire, and lastly had the satisfaction of seeing our own troops arrive.

About 11 a.m. an inhabitant reported that Germans

were in possession of a wooded hill on the northern side of the river which overlooked the bridges at convenient gun-range. Captain Lucas-Tooth, who fell later in the war, sent out a patrol of the 9th Lancers, who shortly returned with the news that no enemy was to be found there.

It was now a little after noon, and all was ready for the destruction of the bridges, one of which, a foot-bridge, had been blown up earlier, as it was not required for the passage of our troops. I therefore gave the necessary order to the Royal Engineer officer in charge and got under the lee of a house, and the steel bridge over the northern arm of the river was blown up, portions of it of all shapes and sizes hurtling through the air and falling on the ground with a dull and weighty thud.

The bridge over the southern arm, however, was a different affair, and was not to be so easily destroyed. It was an old one, built of stone, and consisted of several solid piers, which carried the massive arches. In preparing it for demolition during the previous night the engineers, so as to ensure its destruction at the first attempt, had taken the precaution of laying a charge considerably greater than that prescribed in their text-books for such an operation.

At 1 p.m., the machine-gunners covering the passage having been withdrawn, the charge was fired, but the explosion, though it made the bridge unsafe for vehicles, caused no gap and left it still in a condition

to carry a man on foot or horseback. The one thing which it had been hoped to avoid had thus occurred, and a fresh charge of 480 pounds of gun-cotton had therefore to be brought up and put in place.

While this work, which was carried out with all speed, was in progress the party engaged upon it was protected by the cavalry, some of whom had been dismounted for the purpose. But danger was close at hand, for the delay of several hours in getting my brigade across the river had allowed a party of German Lancers to come up, and by some means they had succeeded in avoiding the notice of our cavalry. Some of them must have discovered a passage and pushed across the stream, and as they came in view the engineer officer at the bridge, whose situation was a critical one, hurriedly withdrew his men and ordered the village to be evacuated. Bullets were now falling thickly, and crashing through the windows of the houses, caused the horses of the engineer tool-cart to stampede with that vehicle. But the engineer officer, Lieutenant Gourlay, had not effected all that was required and was not to be diverted from his duty ; so, snatching up the electrical leads, he fixed them to the exploder and pressed the handle down. The charge exploded instantaneously, blowing a huge gap in the bridge and causing several houses in the village to collapse. Not a moment too soon was the work completed, for dismounted Uhlans were working up the side-streets of the village and the retreat of the demo-

lition party was in imminent danger of being cut off. Indeed, so little time was left that Gourlay and several of his men only escaped capture by springing up behind the troopers of their escort, who speedily galloped off with them to safety, only three men being lost in the whole incident.

Some time earlier I had, at the instance of the engineers, moved off to rejoin my brigade, as it was advisable to keep clear of the débris that would be hurled into the air by the explosion of the third bridge, and had just entered a thick forest half a mile to the south, when an excited cyclist orderly arrived. He informed me that the 9th Lancers had been surprised by Uhlans, who had crossed the river and come up on their flank through the side-streets of the village, and that Lieutenant Gourlay, R.E., had been killed. I sent back the balance of the cyclist company with orders to report to the senior officer on the spot, but the statement which I had received proving to be inaccurate, the facts being as above related, they shortly after rejoined, and the march of the brigade, with which I had meantime come up, was continued. The day was very warm, the roads dusty, and the men as usual very thirsty, but a good deal of shade was available, as much of our route passed through forest land.

When acting as rearguard of a force, apart from the interest which the command and handling of troops near the enemy possesses, the fact that one is inde-



pendent to a considerable degree of the movement of the column covered is not without advantages. When marching, however, as part of the main body, which probably includes both infantry and artillery, the pace is slow and whatever precautions be taken, checks will occur from time to time, causing fatigue and annoyance to the troops. Moreover, halts have to be regulated and take place at fixed hours, and it must often happen that one part of the column comes to rest in a more advantageous place than another as regards both shade and water. On the other hand, the commander of a rearguard is, comparatively speaking, a free agent. His force is required to protect the march of the main body, and provided this object be effected, no restrictions are enforced as to the place, hour, or length of the halts, which are entirely a matter for his own judgment. Consequently he is in a position to save his troops by resting them when and where he wills, though if the enemy be in close touch and active, tactical requirements have to be kept in view. As during the retreat after Le Cateau my brigade acted on most days as rearguard, it was possible in some degree to minimize the fatigues of the march, which for the main body was perhaps more trying.

After we had left the vicinity of the river, we marched by Carlepont, Champ-du-Merlier, to Tracy-le-Mont, where I found the divisional commander, who not unnaturally had begun to feel somewhat anxious at our prolonged delay. Then on by Bascule, Berneuil-

sur-Aisne, to Genancourt, which we reached about 7 p.m., not a little tired, for we had been on the move for about fifteen hours.

Just before dusk the usual German aeroplane hovered over us with the object of noting where our halting-place was likely to be, so that unwelcome visitors in the shape of shells might later on be intruded upon our slumbers. Myself and staff were lodged in an old house adjoining the mill at Genancourt, which is situated in a finely wooded valley. I recall some nice old engravings on the walls of the dining-room, which, I confess, raised covetous feelings, but not being a German, I overcame the temptation to add them to my baggage. So tired were we by this time—the seventh night with no sleep beyond a few hours snatched here and there—that to keep awake during dinner was impossible, and one after another of us nodded off into oblivion during the process of replenishing the inner man.

Next morning, about 6.40 a.m., we received news that the French under General Foch had gained a considerable success and had driven back the German Guard and Tenth Corps at Guise. Soon after the order came for us to move at 7 a.m., too late, however, for it to be executed at the required hour, so the order of march was changed, and instead of being advanced guard, the brigade was ordered to follow at 8.30 a.m. in its now accustomed place at the tail of the division. I afterwards heard that the late arrival of the order was due to the fact that the officer of the divisional staff

whose duty it was to prepare and send it out was so utterly exhausted that he dropped off to sleep in the middle of his work.

The 4th Division was not to move this day in one long column, but in two bodies, divisional headquarters with the 11th Infantry Brigade and the artillery forming the left or southernmost column, and on its right the 19th—an independent brigade—the 12th and 10th Infantry Brigades, under Brigadier-General Wilson of the 12th Infantry Brigade. One of my battalions, the 1st Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers, was diverted to form the rearguard of the left column soon after we reached the Forêt de Compiègne, through which our march was to take place.

Glancing at my map about this time, I saw that we were close to the famous Château de Pierrefonds, from which, if I remember aright, the doughty Porthos of Dumas' "Vingt Ans Après" took one of his numerous baronial titles.

The change from the dusty roads of the preceding days to the long grassy alleys by which the forest is traversed in every direction was a delightful one, and as the day was very hot the shade of the foliage was most welcome. Progress was slow, as we were practically making a flank march and had to cover the movement of the left column, with which were the whole of the guns and impedimenta of the division; the ground, too, was heavy and in places so swampy that we had some difficulty in preventing our vehicles from

becoming bogged. The canopy formed by the branches of the great oaks, beeches, and other trees of the forest completely obscured our movements from aeroplanes, but as Uhlands were reported to be prowling about the forest, precautions, both when moving and halted, had to be taken to protect the column from molestation.

The route we took led via the Puits du Roi to Port de la Croix, where we struck the road from Compiègne to Verberie, which was to be our halting-place. On reaching the Port de la Croix, a civilian cyclist coming from the direction of Compiègne rode up, and on questioning him, I ascertained from his description that German troopers of the Ziethen Hussars were in that town, which he had left about half an hour earlier. I therefore sent some cyclists along the road thither, and blocking with patrols the several roads and tracks which unite at the Port de la Croix, watched my troops go by and then followed with the rearguard.

It was getting dark as we approached Verberie, and the Seaforth Highlanders, who formed the rearguard, were very tired and many suffering from sore feet. My water-bottle and brandy-flask, likewise those of my brigade-major, were soon emptied by the most exhausted. The last of the brigade, however, some holding on to our stirrup-leathers, managed to reach the town, where, pending orders as to night quarters, the men threw themselves down on the sides of the street—which proved to be the allotted bivouac—and were soon fast asleep.

My quarters and those of my staff were in the house of a Monsieur Bousson, evidently a brush-maker, for the factory was established at the back of his house. The inmates had departed, but their absence did not interfere with our making ourselves at home.

No sooner had we reached Verberie than I was sent for to divisional headquarters, where I had some dinner, was given information regarding the situation, and directed to act as rearguard again on the morrow—the seventh time in eight days.

I think that most of us who remembered that next day would be the 1st of September—the anniversary of the Battle of Sedan—felt that there was a possibility of the Germans trying a blow in honour of their earlier success. Personally, as my men were weary with much marching, I hoped that the anniversary might pass off quietly, and the fact that only cavalry seemed to be in our neighbourhood did not lead me to expect that the celebration could in any degree represent the occurrences of forty-four years earlier.

At 5.30 a.m., on the 1st of September, while I was riding north-east of Verberie, in which direction I had been ordered to proceed and seek for a defensive position, the sound of heavy fire of guns and rifles became audible to my right rear. Nothing at a distance was visible, for a thickish white fog overhung the valley in which Verberie is situated. Satisfied that there was no ground in the required direction suitable

for fighting a rearguard action, I hastened back to my brigade and ordered it to fall in.

Meantime I had received orders to proceed southward to St. Vaast, where, after some delay in passing through the narrow streets, which were blocked with vehicles, I joined the divisional commander. He informed me that the 1st Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Briggs, had been in action during the night with German mounted troops supported by artillery, and that I was to assist him by attacking the northern end of the village of Néry. By some mistake the infantry, which should have been protecting the whole of the 4th Divisional Artillery on the plateau whence Verberie is completely dominated from the south, had not been placed in position on the previous evening, and probably, but for the fog, the consequences might have been serious.

I now turned south-eastwards and directed the Royal Irish Fusiliers, supported by the Seaforth Highlanders, all moving in "artillery formation," to proceed against the northern end of Néry. The composite battalion which, owing to heavy losses at Le Cateau, I had formed from the 1st Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and which had preceded the brigade to St. Vaast, had been called upon by the cavalry corps commander, Lieutenant-General Allenby, to assist in extricating the cavalry and guns, and with this battalion the Royal Irish Fusiliers shortly came in touch.

As we moved towards Néry someone told me of the splendid fight which L Battery Royal Horse Artillery had made, and hearing that there were difficulties in the way of removing the German captured guns, I sent back to divisional headquarters for spare teams to be sent up. Three out of four were secured, but the fourth gun was too much damaged to be removed, and I heard later that four more which were left behind by the Germans in their retreat were found by our troops and sent to the rear.

By the time we reached Néry the fighting was over, only a few rifle shots greeting us as we moved towards the village, and I received orders to hold ground there and cover the collection of the wounded. I therefore placed part of my brigade on a front from the vicinity of Néry to La Boissière Farm, and considered the question of retirement, which was to be carried out as soon as the work was completed. I was next instructed to cover the retreat of the 19th Infantry Brigade on my left flank, and get into touch with the 11th Infantry Brigade, the whereabouts of neither of which forces was I able to ascertain.

About 3 p.m., as the cavalry corps headquarters were about to retire, I deemed that I had waited long enough and that the moment had come to move rearwards, which I did across open country to Rully. There half the brigade halted for water, the remainder moving on to a ridge south of that place, where I met Lieutenant-General Pulteney, who, I believe, had just

arrived from England to take command of the Third Corps, to which the 4th Division and the 19th Infantry Brigade, formed of line of communication battalions, belonged. He told me that in advance of us there was some German cavalry, which apparently had worked round our left or eastern flank and was hanging round the villages of Baron and Versigny, the former of which was to constitute our night quarters, and directed me to drive it off.

I pushed on with the Seaforth Highlanders, which were leading, and soon reached the outskirts of the former village, whereupon the enemy's cavalry drew off after firing a few shots. I was informed that my brigade was to be billeted in Baron, which was not ideally placed for purposes of defence, for on the northern side it is overlooked by some undulating ground, and on the southern there is a large wood about a mile distant, which to the nervous might contain vast forces.

While the troops were moving into the village we were a good deal troubled by desultory rifle fire from the vicinity of this wood, but as the day closed the annoyance ceased. There was certainly some cause to be particularly careful to avoid surprise after the experience of the cavalry at Néry on the previous morning, for the straggling nature of the village—taken in conjunction with the ground around it—made the protection of the force, unless an abnormal amount of infantry was placed on outpost duty, a task of difficulty. More-



over, a report had come in during the afternoon that a portion of an ammunition column which, like ourselves, was retiring southwards, had been overtaken by a party of Uhlans and had lost some wagons. However, by compromising and placing strong posts on those points alone which were absolutely essential for safety, the situation could be regarded without undue anxiety.

Before dark I made a tour of the outposts, and assured myself that our connection with those of the 12th Infantry Brigade round the adjoining village of Versigny was satisfactory. Thereafter I repaired to my quarters in an old mill-house, where I slept for some hours on the straw-littered stone floor, for lack of anything in the shape of bed or mattress. But we were not to have a lengthy rest, for orders came that the division was to march southwards at midnight, my brigade following the 12th Brigade and the artillery.

At 3 a.m. we moved off, and as dawn broke reached the wood to which I have already referred. After passing through it, we arrived at open country, and marched along a dusty road bordered by corn or beet-root fields. Our route then took us through the villages of Montagny and Eve, whence the little town of Dammartin-en-Goële, which is situated on an isolated hill, came in view. At 11 a.m. we entered its narrow streets, and quarters for the night were speedily selected in that part of it which was allotted to my brigade. The sun was blazing hot, and the troops were weary and not a few suffering from the effects of

trying to assuage their thirst by eating unripe pears and apples.

After seeing them settled and outposts arranged for, I adjourned to my quarters in a villa called the Maison de Champy, at the southern extremity of the town, whence the occupants had departed, leaving in charge a fox-terrier, who, although at first frightened at our advent, soon made himself and us at home.

I was on the point of taking forty winks in the shady garden when I was sent for to divisional headquarters and informed that the retirement would be resumed at midnight, and that my brigade, with the divisional cyclist company, the 29th Brigade R.F.A., and 9th Field Company R.E., was to form the rear-guard. This involved visits to the commanders of the 12th and 19th Infantry Brigades, whose outposts I was to relieve when they withdrew, and as the latter could not be found, the brigade not yet having arrived at Dammartin, it was nearly dinner-time before a little rest could be snatched.

Dammartin, like most of the places we had passed through, seemed to be emptied of all but a few inhabitants, for news of the brutal manner in which the Germans had behaved in Belgium had spread far and wide, and the general *sauve qui peut* southwards was in progress. It was very noticeable how, in proportion, as we daily approached Paris, such of the inhabitants as had stayed behind looked more dejected, not to say disgusted, at seeing the British troops moving in so

unexpected and undesirable a direction. How very different it all seemed from the cheers that had greeted us as we steamed into Boulogne, and the "Vivent les Anglais!" that resounded in our ears as we moved towards the Belgian frontier! A retreat is never a pleasant operation for a soldier, and the recollection of the sad sights which one witnessed on the march towards the Seine in August and September will live in one's memory for many a day.

At 1.10 a.m. on the 3rd my staff and I were afoot, while the rumbling of vehicles over the cobbled street announced that the 4th Division was again moving rearwards. The rearguard was not to march from its starting-point, three-quarters of a mile south of Dammartin, till 4.30 a.m., and as we rode thither to join it we passed a French cavalry brigade which was apparently coming up to that place in order to cover the withdrawal.

By the time my troops were under way it was almost daylight, and as the sun rose above the horizon it was plain that the march, as on the previous day, would be a thirsty one. The enemy proved again to be at a distance, and we tramped along unmolested, passing through St. Mard, Juilly, Nantouillet, St. Mesmes, Messy, Claye, Souilly, Annet, Thorigny, and over the River Marne to Lagny. The country through which we proceeded was undulating with occasional patches of woodland, and if required, would have lent itself admirably to defence.

From Lagny, where preparations were being made to destroy the river bridges, and near which place I noticed heavy guns being put into position and trenches being dug, we marched to our bivouac near the Bois de Chigny, arriving there at 3.15 p.m. Meanwhile my staff captain had secured for the headquarters of the brigade a *châlet*, the housekeeper of which informed us that her master was in Paris and was engaged in the perfumery trade, a fact which was betrayed by the presence of an unusually large number of scent and other bottles in the bathroom, with some of which I made acquaintance during subsequent ablutions.

Shortly after my arrival I was bidden to report myself at corps headquarters at Lagny, and after concluding my business there I borrowed a motor-car and drove to the *Château de Champs* on the Marne, hoping to find there some friends with whom I had spent a delightful week some eighteen months earlier ; but they had moved to their house in Paris.

Several times during the retreat, which had now covered more than ten days, we had been told that we should be given a halt of some duration, as all ranks, after so many days, or rather nights, of marching were showing signs of exhaustion. Moreover, a certain amount of equipment and clothing had been lost or, what was worse, discarded, and it was desirable that an opportunity should be given for its replacement. But neither halt nor chance of refitting were we to have for several days to come.

The first thing I did on the morning of the 4th of September was to send one of the printed official post-cards to my relations in England, for until this date I had had neither time nor opportunity to despatch a word regarding our movements.

At 8 a.m. I was ordered again to report myself at corps headquarters at the Mairie of Lagny, where I was told that we might remain in our present bivouac for a time, or continue the retirement. No doubt a decision as to our future movements had not yet come from General Headquarters. In the meantime, and in view of our remaining in our present surroundings, I was directed to reconnoitre a position on the left bank of the Marne between Chessy and Magny-le-Hongre, which presumably was intended to be held by my brigade.

The day, as usual, was very warm, and the chauffeur in driving along a narrow road managed to run the car into a ditch. In consequence its occupants, two officers and myself, had to carry out on foot what might otherwise have been effected in a quarter of the time. During this afternoon I heard that my brigade had orders to move to Magny-le-Hongre at 6.30 p.m., which was only some three miles from its bivouac of the previous night, so I decided to join it at that village, which I did as darkness was setting in, and where quarters in a comfortable cottage had been found for me by my staff captain.

At 3.30 a.m. on the 5th of September, while it was

still dark, I watched my brigade march out of Magny and then rode to its head, and some time later we dove-tailed into the place allotted to us in the column of march of the division, which this day was next to the brigade covering the rear.

We moved by Jossigny and Ferrières, at which place we passed through field works that were being constructed by French Territorial troops. The imposing Château de Ferrières, the seat of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, is close to the village of that name, and all the buildings in the vicinity had that well-cared-for look which proclaimed, not only the interest displayed by the proprietor, but the fact that he was the possessor of a well-filled purse.

I felt a peculiar interest in passing through this part of France, as during my already mentioned visit to Champs we had gone over to tea at Ferrières one afternoon and had been shown the many *objets d'art* which the Château contains. It was here, in 1870, that King William and the headquarters of the Prussian Army took up their quarters during the siege of Paris prior to their occupation of the Palace of Versailles. I was told that when the father of the present owner was informed that his château was to be so honoured (?) he left the keys of the cellars in charge of the maître d'hôtel, who was to continue his functions, with a request that in return for his placing everything at the disposal of his guests, they would undertake to preserve intact the many valuable articles which the château

contained. The one-sided agreement was, I believe, scrupulously observed and when the King and his staff left for more regal quarters, after inscribing their names in the visitors' book, it was found that beyond a considerable consumption of the excellent wine which the cellars contained, nothing had been removed. If what one hears of at least one royal personage in the present campaign be true, it is a fortunate thing for the French representative of the Rothschild family and the French nation that Ferrières was not utilized as the headquarters either of the ruling branch of the German nation or of any of the impecunious petty princes who are its adherents. I might add that in going through the rooms occupied by the King and his suite, I was interested to observe that the chamber which Bismarck was stated to have occupied was considerably larger and more comfortable than that which his royal master had inhabited.

After skirting the beautiful park of Ferrières, which, as well as the gardens, is laid out in the English style, we entered the forest of Armainvilliers, where, though the road was dusty, the shade was exceedingly welcome.

I was glad to notice this day that the brief rest near Lagny had done the men good, and that the march discipline, which had fallen much below our accustomed standard on several occasions during the retreat, was somewhat better, though still far from satisfactory. Many young officers and even some older ones seem to

forget that the more trying the conditions are, the stronger is the necessity for tightening up the bonds of discipline. No greater error could be made and nothing could be more harmful than to admit that fatigue and hardship are to be considered as excuses for laxness in the performance of duty. Once allow such an idea to creep into an army, and its fighting value will soon fall fifty per cent. or even lower. In the month of April, less than four months before the European campaign opened, I had passed on foot and bicycle over every yard of Sir John Moore's famous retreat from Benevente to Corunna, and our retreat from Mons caused me no anxiety ; for I knew that the British Army, under Moore, Wellington, and other great commanders, had frequently been forced, owing to its inferior numbers, to retire coastwards until with the arrival of reinforcements it was in a position to advance again and renew the attack. Moore's army, which had fallen back in mid-winter over a barren and mountainous country, had in a retreat covering much the same number of days as ours suffered heavy loss through the slackness of the officers and the consequent indiscipline of the men. Only those portions of his troops which were held together by an iron discipline such as Robert Craufurd, Edward Paget, and the commander of the Guards knew how to wield, had come through the trial with honour, and even among some of these troops flogging had to be inflicted.

Though our training in peace time had largely con-



sisted of practice in offensive operations, the question of retreats, from that of Xenophon onwards, had always interested me. And from the time that I was appointed to command the troops at Shorncliffe I had realized more strongly than before the possibility that, if ever our Army were to take part in a European war, the opening operation which it might be called upon to execute would not improbably take the form of a retreat. In this opinion I had been fortified by reading in the *Army Journal*, I think in 1912, an address by Sir William Robertson to the students at the Staff College ; and a part of what he then stated has, through the events that followed, gained such additional interest that I venture to quote it. "Our regulations," he said, "justly lay stress on the value of the offensive ; but think what may be the effect of this teaching upon the troops if it alone is given, when they are ordered to retire instead of to go forward—that is, to abandon that method of war by which alone, according to the training they have previously received, decisive victory can be achieved ? Think, too, of the disintegration and demoralization which nearly always accompany retrograde movements, even when an army has not been previously defeated ! It seems to me that there is practically no chance of successfully carrying out this operation in war unless we thoroughly study and practise it beforehand during peace. If we have this previous practice, the operation will not then come as a surprise to the troops in war ; they will understand

better what they are expected to do ; and they will recognize it as being a form of war which may have to be adopted by any army, and can be adopted not only without failure but with a certain measure, ultimately, of success." As, prior to the events at Mons, nothing was further from the mind of most British officers than the possibility of a retreat, the words quoted above seem to me to be all the more striking.

We continued our march through the forest, and, during the afternoon, reached Chevry, a long straggling village, where I found I was quartered in the house of the manager of a sugar factory, which was sufficiently adjacent to cause the fly pest to abound. The domestics here were particularly attentive, and I was soon provided with a bath, after which I proceeded as usual to visit my outposts and the troops in their billets. I saw General Murray, Sir John French's chief staff officer, who, hearing I was in the village, looked in on me for a few minutes and told me that the French Sixth Army was engaged on our left facing east, and on our right was the French Fifth Army, under a new commander, which was fighting at St. Barthélemy. The British forces were thus between these two armies, and he added to my great satisfaction that if the latter army were to be successful our retreat might be stayed and the advance begin.

We had marched without a day's halt for thirteen days, and had covered a distance of 170 miles. This, though not in actual mileage a feat, has some claim to

be considered one when it is remembered that the majority of the troops were men who had returned from civil life and had not probably done much in the way of walking exercise or carrying weights for at least a year. The weather, too, was considerably hotter than is generally experienced in England, and what was perhaps the greatest trial of all was the lack of sleep. Indeed, except in the bivouac near the Bois de Chigny on the 3rd of September, no officer or man of the brigade had had a full night's rest since the 20th of August, the day before the troops left Harrow for the Front. The *moral* of all ranks, considering that they had been retiring for so many days, left nothing to be desired, and I do not think that a single individual of the brigade had lost that innate feeling of superiority over the foe and the utter impossibility of being vanquished by him which seems to be the natural heritage of the British soldier. Throughout the march I had lost no opportunity of impressing on all ranks the fact that the British Army in earlier campaigns had often been forced by its inferiority in numbers or through circumstances to retire, and that even should we be obliged to fall back as far as the Pyrenees, the day would assuredly come when we should once more turn our faces and not our backs towards the foe.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ADVANCE TO THE AISNE

MY confidence that we would reverse the direction of our march was soon to be justified, for very early on the 6th my brigade-major came to my room to tell me that we were to move at 3 a.m., and that the brigade was to form the advanced guard of the division. The hour of starting was subsequently changed to 2.15 a.m., which left very little time to get the troops on the march, but we managed to clear the railway on the road to Ferrières only a quarter of an hour later than the hour which had been laid down.

The moon was shining brightly as we made our way through the forest which we had traversed on the preceding day, and the difference in the demeanour of the troops now that they had their heads turned towards the enemy was very noticeable. The battalions, too, had all received reinforcements at Chevry, and several officers and men who had got separated from their units at Haucourt on the 26th of August had rejoined. Of the enemy nothing was to be seen except two aeroplanes which passed high overhead, and whose occupants could scarcely have seen us on account of the leafy poplars which overspread the road.

At 8 a.m. we reached Jossigny, whence, after ten minutes' halt, we proceeded to Serris. As I had been ordered to halt on suitable ground near this latter village and another called Bailly, I threw forward outposts, and placing the remainder of my troops under cover of the houses and trees, rode off to reconnoitre the ground. While engaged in doing so my staff captain came up, and told me that the First Corps on our right was understood to be engaged or in touch with the Germans, and that I was to move at once to a line from Voulangis to point 138 south of Crecy, being relieved by the 12th Infantry Brigade which was close behind. He had warned the troops to march, and at 2.50 p.m. they caught us up. The Seaforth Highlanders, which led, advanced to the point named, where they took up a concealed position and whence officers' patrols were pushed forward to reconnoitre the crossings over the river; while the Royal Irish Fusiliers, acting as left flank guard and eventually relieved by the 12th Infantry Brigade, moved through Villiers-sur-Morin to the château west of Voulangis. The remainder of the brigade, with the 29th Brigade R.F.A. and a section of the 9th Field Company R.E., advanced to a position which favoured concealment, where, after cooking, fires were extinguished at 7.30 p.m. and arrangements for the night halt made. Meantime I had gone to the outposts and then returned to pass the night on a bundle of straw by the roadside.

An hour before dawn on the 7th the brigade stood to

arms as usual until the outpost patrols reported all clear to the front, and shortly afterwards orders came that we were not to move before 8 a.m., but thereafter were to be prepared to do so at short notice. As far as I was able to gather, the Germans were retiring across our front, and from 6.30 a.m. onwards heavy gun fire was audible from the direction of Meaux, which lay due north of our bivouac. As time went on, the firing seemed to become more distant, and I wondered why we remained inactive with the enemy retiring in front of us.

About 11 a.m. I was directed to move to the church at Voulangis, and covered by an advanced guard composed of a squadron of the North Irish Horse and two companies of the 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders under Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Evelyn Bradford, we soon reached that point. Thence we crossed the River Morin at Crecy, near which place the vanguard took the wrong road, a mistake easily made, for the map was not particularly clear in some of its details. I turned the main body on to a cross-road, and, guided by a man who informed me that he was a servant of the Comte de Moustier, whose property we skirted in our march, we regained our proper route, as also did the advanced guard.

The day was very warm, and the soldiers, as always, were very thirsty, but the first hourly halt offered no facilities for watering them. At that time the firing to the north was less noticeable, and there did not seem to

me to be much prospect of coming up with the enemy. What had caused his retreat we did not know, but that he was retiring was evident from the direction of our march, and if confirmation of his change of plan was wanting, it soon arrived in a message from Sir John French. In this the Field-Marshal stated that the attempt of the Germans to reach Paris had failed, and that we and the French were both going to pursue them. He exhorted us to put our best leg forward, as no doubt he hoped to bring the enemy to battle. Exhortations were not, however, necessary, for the troops were marching well and everyone was chafing at the slowness of the advance, and was eager to turn the tables on the enemy and make him feel a little of what we had gone through during the preceding fourteen days. Indeed, I might almost say that even the promised halt of several days which had been so eagerly looked forward to by all ranks was forgotten or the thought of it for the time being set aside. I felt considerable doubt whether, with the good start he appeared from the sound of the guns to have got, we should come up with him, and our tardy movement from our last night's bivouac did not tend to weaken this view.

On this day I was informed that the French Government had been pleased to allot to the British Army a certain number of crosses of the Legion of Honour and Military Medals (*Médailles Militaires*)—the former for junior officers, the latter for non-commissioned officers

and men who had distinguished themselves—and that I was to submit fifteen names, which I did at the earliest opportunity.

We continued our march, and reached at 2.30 p.m. the considerable village of Maisoncelles, where the inhabitants, as elsewhere, were in high spirits at seeing us advance. Here we halted to water, and I was informed that the main body of the division would remain at the village for the night. The infantry of the advanced guard, formed from two battalions of my brigade—the 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders and 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers—was to act as outposts in touch with the 12th Infantry Brigade on our left at La Calabre. The 5th and 3rd Divisions were on my right, and it seemed that the Second Army Corps formed of these divisions, and the 4th Division, the sole division then of the Third Army Corps, with the 19th Infantry Brigade, were generally on the line Coulommiers—Maisoncelles—Sancy.

While we were halted and watering men and animals, a report arrived that the German rearguard, consisting of 3,000 troops of all arms, had passed through Bisset, one mile east of Faremouttiers, at 2 a.m. At 3.20 p.m. the previous order was cancelled and I was directed to get ready to march to Doué in pursuit of the enemy's rearguard, whose condition was colloquially but, I think, erroneously described as "stone cold." By 3.30 p.m. the men had fallen in and were moving off when I received yet another order that the direction of

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my march was to be Aulnoy, which lies some three miles south-west of Doué.

We marched out of Maisoncelles, and as there appeared to be no direct road to our destination, some cyclists were sent in advance to reconnoitre a cross-country track. While awaiting their report, Colonel Seely, the late Secretary of State for War, who was serving as aide-de-camp to Sir John French, drove up in a car with the object of ascertaining where we proposed to bivouac for the night. I was unable to give him this information, but he offered his own opinion on the situation, which was an interesting one. Later on he frequently visited my headquarters and front trenches on the Aisne, and on more than one occasion then and during the war proved that the term by which military members are customarily addressed in the House of Commons was in his case no empty compliment.

The country track was soon reported to be sufficiently good to take wheeled transport, so the march was resumed and we proceeded to Les Fermiers Farm, where I was directed to take up an outpost position from Bois-la-Ville by Ferme Grand Justin to Grand Loge Ferme. As the last of the advanced guard was passing l'Epineuse Farm, a battery shelled the ground over which it had just passed, doing no harm, but disclosing the fact that the rearguard of the German troops in front of us was not more than 6,000 yards distant. My headquarters at night were in a

farm at Giremoutiers, where the Germans had preceded us and made hay of everything—and the inhabitants, from what remained, must have been very well-to-do—leaving as proof of their earlier presence there a box of small-arms ammunition.

At 3 a.m. on the 8th I was up, and fortunately so, for everyone at my headquarters that morning but myself—thanks to an alarm clock which I found in my room—overslept themselves. I found that we were to form a reserve under the immediate orders of the general commanding the Third Corps, but as the day went on we reverted to the 4th Division. At 3.45 a.m. we moved off, and an hour later were at Les Fermiers Farm, the required spot. I there heard that the rest of the division and the 19th Infantry Brigade were to clear up the situation towards Pierre-Levéé, and to be on a line facing that place at 6 a.m. The supplies, owing to railway difficulties, had again—this had happened several times—not been issued on the preceding night, and as the iron ration in the men's possession had already been consumed, we were relieved to see the loaded lorries arrive soon after we reached Les Fermiers.

The morning was chilly, and except for the sound of some guns in a northerly direction, had a very peaceful air about it. The men soon started cooking their bacon and making tea, and while my own meal was preparing I wrote a dozen postcards and a letter recounting the events from the date of our landing to the 1st of

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September inclusive. The incidents of the march, though they had succeeded one another fairly quickly, were indelibly stamped on my memory, the more so probably because as often as I got a chance I committed them to my diary. Few at this time knew the exact reason why the Germans were falling back so hurriedly, and we had to be satisfied with the knowledge that the direction they were taking was a much better one from our point of view than that of a few days earlier.

At 8 a.m. I was ordered to assemble my brigade a quarter of a mile south of Grand Loge Ferme, and reconnoitre the road to Petit-Courrois. Next an aeroplane message was received that the Germans were crossing the Marne at La Ferté-sous Jouarre, a name familiar to anyone who has studied Napoleon's great campaign of 1814 in the district through which we were passing. It was stated that the length of the retreating column was such that it had taken twenty-eight hours for it to pass through Maisoncelles. My anxiety to get on the move in order to molest the retreating enemy was great, but for a long time I got no orders to move, though I went personally to solicit them.

The advanced guard of the 4th Division consisted of the 12th Infantry Brigade, and was followed by the 29th and 37th Field Artillery Brigades and my own brigade. We reached Petit-Courrois at noon, and I was ordered to halt my troops in assembly formation in a field. To my relief, the howitzer brigade of the division now moved on, for every moment seemed to me

to be precious, and I feared lest we might not succeed in coming up with the Germans and interfering with their withdrawal, though a cavalry brigade, under that brilliant leader Gough, was said already to have crossed the Marne. So far as I was concerned, there was to be no question of fighting.

After a time I was ordered to move forward to the high ground south of La Ferté, being warned that the wood on my right was full of all sorts of dangers, none of which was encountered. There we halted, and I began dictating my report on the share my brigade had taken in what is known as the battle of Le Cateau on the 26th August ; but my brigade-major, Major Daniell of the Seaforth Highlanders, who had not spared himself from the moment we mobilized and had lived almost without sleep, dozed off so frequently that I was obliged to restrain my eloquence.

The situation so far as I could gather was that the Germans were still south of the Marne on our right and north of it on our left, while our 12th Infantry Brigade had secured a bridge over the Morin River at Courcelles, with the 11th Infantry Brigade on its left trying to reach the crossing over the Marne at La Ferté. I felt that any effort to force the passage at the last place in sufficient time to make success of any value would be hopeless. Our howitzers during the afternoon had in vain shelled the houses on the right bank of the river, which were held by determined detachments whose machine-guns commanded the bridge at short range.

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Whether it was then passable or not I do not know, but next morning when I saw it, it had been rendered temporarily useless. Passage here, therefore, was out of the question, but the map disclosed the existence of at least one point of crossing, or a boat or barge if available would have served to place troops on the right bank and take the defenders in rear.

Late in the afternoon, after bivouacking my brigade on the side of the road, I moved into the Hôtel des Bois, a large and dirty farm built round a spacious and odoriferous courtyard. Here the divisional general and I took up our quarters for the night, my sleeping-place being under a wagon on a truss of straw. Before turning in, I finished dictating the report on Le Cateau and later received an order to act next day as advanced guard. As, however, the right bank of the Marne was still in hostile hands, I was persuaded that we should not be able to cross till well on in the day.

I may here mention that during the afternoon of the 8th Sir John French saw the divisional commander and told him that he had hoped to be able to see the brigade commanders and commanding officers of units to tell them that the 4th Division had by its conduct and bearing saved the situation at the beginning of the retreat and that its work would rank as one of the finest feats of the British Army! Presumably the Field-Marshal's words referred to our stand at Le Cateau on the 26th of August.

On the 9th of September I was up at 3.30 a.m.,

when I saw my brigade supply officer, who had gathered news somewhere to the effect that a wireless telegram from a German commander had been intercepted which stated that unless fresh horses were received some guns would have to be abandoned. Further, that eighteen French cavalry regiments were engaged in pushing to the German right rear, so that by delaying the retirement we might have time to come up and attack. This latter piece of news may have been true, but the events that followed made me think that the German retreat was far too well ordered a movement to give an opening for a serious blow on our part. During the morning heavy gun fire was audible in a northerly direction, where I heard that the Sixth French Army was encountering heavy opposition and making no progress, and whither strong reinforcements had been despatched on the 8th.

As the morning hours went by my thoughts involuntarily took me back to the famous crossing of the Douro by Wellington's army, and I wondered why the Marne, which from the ground where my brigade was bivouacked was quite invisible, continued to defy our efforts to advance. At length a report came in that the 5th Division was crossing the river at Méry and Montreuil. That would surely help to clear the vexatious enemy from our front ! However, it was ordained that we were not to tread the further bank that day, and guns and howitzers kept on firing monotonously at the obstructive holders of the houses near the bridge.

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When the post came in during our hours of waiting, it brought the extraordinary story then current at home, that Russians had been secretly landed in England and were to join us by way of Ostend. The report, of course, proved later to be false, but war tends to excite the imagination of certain people, and not only at home but in the field "tall tales" are rife and readily accepted.

The lengthy wait at the Hôtel des Bois proved useful for the purpose of letter-writing, but besides this I inspected and addressed a particularly fine draft of Gordon Highlanders—my old regiment—who were en route to join the 1st Battalion, but were for the present to be attached to the 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders of my brigade.

It will not, perhaps, be considered a breach of confidence if I here mention that I was told by the letter censor that an imaginative Celt among them had just handed in a postcard for transmission. In this he stated to his sweetheart that on his march up country he had passed thousands of dead Germans, and that it was only with difficulty that he and his comrades could move along the road, such was the crowd of prisoners who were being conducted to the rear! After hearing this and many other tales of like exaggerated nature, one was better able to understand, but not appreciate, the wondrous deeds of prowess which for a time and to the disgust of the Army appeared in certain London daily papers. It is to be hoped that in future wars

the publication by the press of letters from those serving at the Front will be forbidden. The value of such communications as true representations of occurrences in the field will be apparent if it is remembered that in many cases the further the writer happened to be from the danger zone the more lurid did his descriptions become, for by flights of imagination he was forced to supply deficiencies of fact.

At 3.45 p.m. I was ordered to be prepared to move to Les Poupelains, and at 4.30, when the day was cooler, we moved off. After passing through Jouarre, we traversed a wooded, hilly region and arrived at the little village of Grand Mont Menard, where my night quarters were to be, the troops being bivouacked in the fields close by. On the way there the divisional commander passed us lying at full length in a motor-car and looking somewhat pale. His horse had unfortunately stumbled and rolled over him on the road; but he called out to me that he was all right, though, as events proved, it was some weeks before he had completely recovered and could return to the Front.

I felt that night that we had lost a great opportunity through our pursuit being slow, and an aeroplane scout, who stated that he had counted seventy-two German trains full of troops steaming eastward, added a remark to that effect at the end of his report. The proprietress of the cottage in which I was billeted told me that three German officers had passed the previous night in her dwelling, and that their behaviour had been unexcep-



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tionable. They left no traces behind them, no broken furniture or ransacked cupboards, merely a copy of the *Deutsche Krieger-Zeitung*, the news in which was too out-of-date to be of any use.

I enjoyed a good night's rest, and at 4.20 a.m., when I rose, was informed that my brigade was to move so as to reach the bridge at La Ferté by 7.15 a.m. On our way there I looked in at the Château de Tartarel, where the divisional commander had passed the night, and found that he had been removed to Coulommiers. His successor in the command, Brigadier-General Wilson, of the 12th Infantry Brigade, told me that it was uncertain whether I should be able to cross the Marne at La Ferté, owing to the damage done to the bridge, the defenders of which, after delaying our advance for some thirty-six hours, had decamped northwards during the night. He added that the French Sixth Army, which had had some very heavy fighting during the preceding days, would not be capable of continuing the pursuit during the next two days.

On reaching the road fork four-fifths of a kilometre from La Ferté, a message arrived to say that I was required to cross by the railway bridge at Le Saussoy and that my two rear battalions had been diverted there by way of Le Tillet, Luzancy, and Courtoron. To turn round the transport in the narrow road in which we were would have taken too long, so we moved on to La Ferté and thence through Reuil.

I rode down to the bridge at La Ferté, which was being replaced by pontoons, for the permanent crossing had been damaged in a very thorough manner. The inhabitants of this pretty little town in the well-wooded valley of the Marne appeared glad to see us, but from the writing in chalk on the doors of a few of the houses—"Gute Leute, alles gegeben, Schonung"—it was evident that some of them, at least, and probably through fear, had behaved satisfactorily to their late visitors. I was surprised to see this marking still left by any inhabitant on his door, for though intended, of course, for German troops which the writer thought might later occupy the billet, it would serve as anything but a recommendation to any French or British soldiers who might follow.

The difficulty of forcing the passage of the Marne and the advisability of attempting to do so by stratagem were apparent when one marched close along the water-side, for the thickly wooded northern bank ran fairly steeply down to the stream, making it an easy matter to defend the crossing. Nevertheless I believe that the railway bridge, towards which we were marching and which I had assumed would, like the passage at La Ferté, be destroyed, could have been seized by surprise on the 8th or 9th of September, for I could find on the German side no evidences of any defensive works. Our arrival north of the river might possibly have relieved the pressure on the Sixth French Army, and allowed it to advance in its decisive

direction. Such were my reflections as I watched my troops and transport filing across the railway bridge during a rainstorm, but a wider knowledge of the situation might possibly have shown me unknown obstacles and led, perhaps, to a different conclusion.

The process of forcing vehicles through loose metal, with the wheels bumping from sleeper to sleeper, is a slow one and puts a heavy strain on horses, and it was not till 11.40 a.m. that the brigade, less one battalion, which was left to help the divisional transport at the bridge, was on the northern bank. Then we marched upstream to La Code and up a steep hill to the Montreuil road, where a halt of about an hour was made.

I think it was here that I saw the first batch of German prisoners, fourteen in number, taken during the advance. They were mostly footsore, having no doubt straggled from their regiments, and formed an immense source of interest to my troops, who were probably disappointed at their first close view of the supermen !

We were now on the high rolling ground which fills up the space between the Marne and the Ourcq, and which is well furnished with considerable patches of woodland. At 2.15 p.m. we moved forward again, the 19th Infantry Brigade acting as flank guard on a road parallel to our own, but west of it. We passed through Chambardy and Dhuisy and came to Coulombs, which was to be the halting-place for the

greater portion of the division, while the advanced guard was quartered at Cerfroid and Vaux. The inhabitants of Coulombs, which is a large village with a curious-looking church, told us that the Germans who had been there the previous night had behaved roughly, taking much and paying for nothing, which seemed in most places to have been their customary method of treating the civil population.

Next morning, the 11th of September, everything seemed to go wrong. The advanced guard which was under me and consisted of the 10th Infantry Brigade, a squadron of the 16th Lancers under Major Campbell, the divisional cyclist company, 29th Brigade R.F.A., and a howitzer battery of the 37th F.A. Brigade, should have been off at 4.30 a.m., but two of my battalions were late and the other two had not received their full issue of rations. The artillery, too, had not had breakfast, and through lack of facilities or the early hour their horses had not been watered. However, the fact of our being a little late in starting did not seem to matter, and although we were pursuing, there appeared to be no wild anxiety to push forward, which was probably due to the dependence of our own movement upon that of troops on our flanks.

On reaching Montigny l'Allier, I was informed by a guide that the road we were ordered to take thence through the Bois de Gandelu was impassable for transport. After reporting this fact, I rode off to reconnoitre what seemed a feasible track, but it ended

abruptly in a ploughed field. I then suggested that we should move by Fulaines, which I expected might be within the marching area of the French on our left, as the road was broad and afforded sufficient space for three columns to march abreast.

While waiting for orders, ten prisoners were brought in by my vanguard and a couple more who had been wounded by the cyclists. The order now came adopting my suggestion, and we soon caught up a battalion of Turcos who were having their breakfast at the side of the road and with whom my men speedily fraternized. Some of the latter who had served in India tried to converse with them in Hindustani, but needless to say the only response they got was a broad grin.

Soon the French troops moved and then we followed, and after passing through Fulaines came upon visible signs of retreat in the shape of ammunition, smashed aeroplanes, dead horses, and débris of various kinds. Such signs as these, so far as they came under my own observation, had not by any means been a feature of our retirement, although it had taken place very early in the campaign after severe fighting and in particularly sultry weather.

While my brigade staff and I were passing through a wood a little distance in advance of my troops, we noticed a hundred yards off down a ride a rifle protruding from the undergrowth with a handkerchief hanging from the muzzle. On going to the place, we

found three men of the 49th German Infantry Regiment who had wandered from their column and were waiting till the Turcos had passed to give themselves up as prisoners. They were very hungry, but, unlike others who for some time haunted a considerable district south of the Aisne—coming out of the woods at night to demand food from the peasants and by day firing in comparative security at the passing troops—they had no taste for a prolonged residence in the open.

At St. Quentin we ran into the advanced guard of the 5th Division on our right, and halted to allow it to move on, when we again took the road. Then on by Montémafroy, La Loge aux Bœufs, Passy-en-Valois, Marizy Ste. Geneviève, and two other Marizys to Villers-le-Petit. At one of these places the German rearguard must have been engaged presumably by our cavalry, for there were a number of dead lying about.

I rode on to La Loge Farm, fixed upon the outpost line and arranged for touch with the 5th Division, which was reported to be on our right, and then returned to my night quarters in Villers-le-Petit, a village of moderate size in which we managed to stow away three battalions.

The cavalry with my vanguard reported at night that no enemy had been seen during the march, but as I returned from La Loge Farm some French guns were busily shelling some woods lying about two miles to the north-east.

We had had some heavy rain early in the day and

during the latter part of the march, but as it had often been our fate to pass the night in the open, we were fortunate in having quarters in a village where the men could get their drenched clothes dried.

On the 12th of September my brigade, with the cavalry squadron and an artillery brigade, again acted as advanced guard. We moved off at 5.30 a.m., our route leading through Les Vallées-de-Nadon, Louâtre, and Villers-Hélon, where we passed a pretty château, to Montrebœuf Farm, where the sound of guns and shells bursting apparently in front of a sugar refinery about two and a half miles to the north could be heard. As we pushed on in that direction I came across a staff officer of the 45th French Division who informed me that a brigade of that division moving up from the south was attacking Noyant, which lies about three miles to the north, and that other troops were advancing from the west of that place in a northerly direction. He added that the Germans were strongly entrenched on the left (southern) bank of the Aisne, and that their line extended from the Montagne de Paris in a southeasterly direction. I told him that I was on my way forward to seize Septmonts, and would, therefore, come up on the right of his division.

As it was evident that near the refinery my troops would be visible to the enemy from the north, I drew them south of the road and bore off across country in an easterly direction, and, passing through Ville-montoire, arrived on a level with Buzancy at 11 a.m.

A little later my vanguard, which consisted of cavalry and cyclists, reported that there was no enemy on the Septmonts ridge, and about the same time an officer of the 2nd Regiment of Chasseurs d'Afrique, which passed me moving rapidly southward, corroborated the statement.

I now ordered the infantry of the mainguard to push on, intending to reach the ridge by way of Rozières, and directed a battery to be prepared to follow quickly as soon as word was received that my infantry was established on the ridge. At this moment an order came from the 4th Division that the Germans were holding the high ground south of Soissons in strength, and that I was not to push my vanguard beyond Septmonts—where it then was—which lies at the foot of the ridge on the southern side. I reported that my information did not agree with that received, that the cavalry had just informed me that it was pushing on to reconnoitre the crossing at Venizel, and that I was prepared to move all my troops forward at once. While waiting at Buzancy, which is prettily situated on a hill, I took refuge in the church from a heavy shower of rain and dictated orders for our further anticipated movement. On the walls of the building were several memorial tablets to the family of Puy Ségur, and some of the inhabitants were engaged in prayer.

On coming out of this church, a peasant woman kindly invited myself and my brigade-major to come into her cottage, where she made us cocoa. She told



us that her son was a captain in the regular infantry, and I noticed that the family had earlier military connections, for framed and hung on the wall was her grandfather's certificate for the Médaille de St. Helène.

At 1 p.m. I was directed to secure the heights above Septmonts and the bridge at Venizel, reporting on its suitability for the passage of troops, and was told that the main body, which had been several miles behind us when I reached Buzancy, was following on.

We pushed on and reached the ridge above Septmonts at 3 p.m., whence on the high ground across the Aisne a considerable quantity of German troops and transport could be seen moving north-east along the Laon road.

In order to overlook the river I rode forward and saw through my telescope infantry holding trenches on the far side in front of Bucy-le Long. The cavalry squadron now reported that the Germans had damaged the bridge at Venizel, which, however, could still be used, that it had been fired on, and had had one man killed in the village. The divisional commander soon joined me, and was followed at 4.30 p.m. by the four 60-pounder long-range guns, which must have left England some time after we embarked, for this was the first occasion that I had seen them since the autumn manœuvres of the previous year. As the heavy draught-horses breasted the steep hill, and the guns came into action, the men of my brigade, pleased by

their arrival, broke into a hearty cheer. Soon they began dropping shrapnel shells over the retiring Germans at a range of 9,000 yards, causing apparently a good deal of consternation in their ranks.

As evening closed in, I was ordered to take my brigade back to Septmonts, where we arrived after dark in a torrent of rain. The greatest confusion pervaded the place, as although the village—which is a large one—had been divided into several allotments for the troops that were to profit by the shelter it afforded, the routes by which these troops were to reach their billets had not been assigned, nor had policing of the roads by the higher staff been arranged. At the beginning of a war such mistakes are liable to occur, and it is well that they should occur early in the campaign, so that the lesson can be taken to heart. The confusion on this occasion only caused temporary inconvenience, and the troops were so pleased to know that they were going into billets and were not to remain in the open, that a ducking and some standing about while they were being unravelled was of little consequence.

I had been ordered earlier to go to divisional headquarters at La Carrière de l'Evêque Farm, and was sent back to Septmonts in a motor, which, however, could not get through the blocked streets ; so, getting out, I made my way to the château where I knew I was to be billeted.

The night was excessively dark and the village not

being lighted, it was impossible, unless one happened to have an electric lamp, to avoid walking into horses and transport. I soon found myself inside the welcome gates of the château, and heard that the owner or tenant had made preparations to receive us. He told me that he was a Spaniard, and mentioned that during the German advance he fancied that a son of the Kaiser, from the respect with which he was treated, had been his guest, and the latter as well as the staff talked confidently of being in Paris in two days. I had an excellent night's rest from 10 p.m. till 5.30 a.m., in a palatial bed and bedroom, for the château, I was told, had at some period of its history been a royal domain and had sheltered kings and queens within its walls.

Shortly after an order came that we were to hold ourselves in readiness to march at 7 a.m. ; but I was not to leave Septmonts without something that will always remind me of the night spent there. First the Maire came to complain that the whole village had been sacked and the majority of the houses had had the locks of their doors forced. I at once sent him off accompanied by my staff captain and another officer of my staff who spoke French perfectly. They soon returned and informed me that they had gone where he indicated, and that his statement was without foundation, and that if any doors had been forced it was due to the stupidity of the inhabitants, who in some cases had refused to admit those billeted upon them.

Hardly had this matter been, so far as I was concerned, satisfactorily settled when the lord of the château came to me, more in trepidation than anger, to say that his wife, who seemed to be a lady of irascible temperament, had found that some very valuable rose-trees of great antiquity had been destroyed during the night. His description of the damage sounded so serious that I at once went to make a personal inspection, taking good care to keep out of reach of the tongue of her ladyship. I found that in the darkness and rain of the preceding night a rose-tree to which by mistake a horse had been fastened by a halter had been torn up by the roots, and another which clung to the wall of the château had been nibbled beyond repair. In my best French I humbly apologized, offered to pay the damage, and promised when I returned to England to send him a couple of the best rose-trees I could find. His wife now came on the scene, whereupon my staff, not unwisely, forsook their general and fled. She opened her batteries by saying that we had been received *à bras ouverts*, and in return had treated them very differently from what the Germans had done. I replied regretting what had occurred, and hinted that had she seen what the Germans could do in the way of damage when they tried, she would probably alter her opinion of us and them. But I was no match for her volubility, and after failing to appease her with grovelling apologies, gently hinted that she and her husband

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were fortunate in such times to have a roof above their heads and still more so to have the British Army to come and protect them. This, as I might have guessed, only added fuel to the fire of her wrath, so, despairing of appeasing her, I bowed adieu and left the château.

At 7.40 we mounted the same high ground above Septmonts as we had occupied on the previous day, and formed up there out of sight of the right bank of the Aisne in line of quarter column, the whole of the first line transport being parked in rear.

No German troops were visible on the Laon road, and as regards our own, I heard that the 11th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division had crossed the Aisne and was in Bucy-le Long, while the 12th Infantry Brigade was still on the left bank waiting for the construction of a bridge at Venizel.

As at this time the troops who had crossed the river were rather isolated, I was directed at 11.50 a.m. to move my brigade to a covered position between La Tuilerie and Villeneuve St. Germain, and be ready to cover the retirement of the 11th Infantry Brigade should that improbable contingency become necessary.

The road to my position was for part of the way so blocked with transport that I could not march till 12.15 p.m., and as several long stretches of it were in full view of the enemy, it is strange that he did not shell it.

On reaching La Tuilerie, we came under the fire of

howitzers at a road fork which, though not visible to the Germans, was, as it proved, a likely place to hinder the march of troops moving towards the river. I rode on and found a good grass-track, completely concealed from view, through a wood, and soon had the brigade lying down in a covered position where there was nothing to disturb them except the frequent hum overhead of German big shells which were trying to find our 60-pounder guns.

I next went across the railway with my brigade-major to look for ground whence we could help the 11th Infantry Brigade if it were driven back on Venizel, but the woods and trees on the banks of the Aisne through limiting the view would have greatly interfered with any assistance we could give.

We remained where we were till 6 p.m., when I was ordered to arrange for billets for my troops in Venizel and Billy-sur-Aisne. That order, however, did not hold for long, for a quarter of an hour later I was directed to cross the Aisne at the former of these villages, and moving my brigade through the 11th and 12th Brigades, which were now on the high ground north of Bucy-le Long and Ste. Marguerite, drive back the Germans who were in front of them. I was at the same time directed to take command of all the 4th Division troops which had crossed the Aisne.

At this point I may mention that since leaving Chevry on the 6th we had marched in all ninety miles. This number, added to the sum total of our marches

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in the retreat, raised the distance covered to the respectable total of 260 miles in twenty-two days, which, it must be remembered, had been accomplished with none of the customary halts of twenty-four hours and not even one of half that length. Truly it had again been proved, as was said, I think, by Marshal Saxe, that "the strength of an army lies in its legs." The troops were now fit and hard and cases of sore feet had become increasingly rare.

## CHAPTER V

### ON THE AISNE

THE 10th Brigade now moved to Venizel, but as the pontoon bridge there had been broken and the permanent bridge was still unsafe except for troops in single file, we did not begin to cross till nearly midnight, and reached Bucy about 1 a.m. on the 14th. On arriving there, I went to Brigadier-General Hunter-Weston's headquarters in an estaminet, he having crossed the river with the 11th Brigade many hours earlier. He had three rather exhausted battalions on the high ground above, and on his right the 12th Brigade had taken with loss the German front line trenches at Chivres. What number of Germans were in front of us it was impossible to tell, but their position was well chosen and entrenched, and any movement forward on our part during daylight had drawn heavy musketry fire.

I now reported to headquarters of the division, stating that I was moving two battalions (2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders and 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers) into the gaps in Hunter-Weston's front. I added that if it could be arranged for the 5th Division



on my right to attack the enemy's left at Chivres, I would co-operate and take every opportunity to push forward, but that to do so by a purely frontal attack without some pressure against the enemy's left would be very costly even if successful.

At 1.30 a.m. I saw the commanders of the two battalions which were to reinforce the 11th Brigade, and after giving them instructions as to the action required of them, warned them that I wanted a careful watch kept on the Germans in case they retired, for at this time it was uncertain if the enemy intended to stand or continue his retreat. I then lay down on the floor of the room and slept soundly for about two hours.

At 5 a.m. I was up and heard that my arrangements had been approved both by the division and by the Army Corps, and that the divisional commander was shortly coming to see me. By this time a headquarters had been found for me in a small cottage, the inhabitants of which had ensconced themselves for safety in the cellar.

At 9.30 a.m. a message came from the Seaforth Highlanders to say that their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Evelyn Bradford, had been killed. I at once went to the battalion and found that a single shell which had been fired at the flank of its position had killed him instantaneously, while he was engaged in examining the ground in front in view of a possible advance. His death was a great loss to

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the brigade and to myself personally, making the fourth and last of my battalion commanders who had become non-effective since we landed in France, though he alone fell in action. After walking round the position and finding that the German line was distant some eight hundred yards from our own, I returned to my headquarters in the village below.

During the afternoon the divisional commander came to Bucy, and shortly after he left the draft of the Gordon Highlanders which was attached to my brigade was put into action for the first time to recover some trenches which had been lost through the heavy shell fire which had been directed on the occupants. This duty they carried out with such dash, under the young officer, Lieutenant Murray, who commanded them and was unfortunately killed, that it called forth the admiration of the Seaforth Highlanders who were looking on.

It had now become fairly evident that the Germans had retired as far as they intended, and that they were occupying positions which had been selected and in some degree prepared for defence in anticipation of such a movement. This fact was recognized by General Headquarters, for on the morning of the 15th I was informed that the Commander-in-Chief had ordered offensive action to cease temporarily and the positions which the British Army held to be strengthened.

I now divided the front of the 4th Division into three

portions, each held by the equivalent of a brigade, and the battalions which I had thrown into the gaps in the line on the 14th were on the 18th withdrawn and put into their proper places.

On the same date the 19th Infantry Brigade at Venizel was placed under my command, and I sent for a battalion—the 2nd Bn. Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders—to join me at Bucy as a reserve. On the 15th, too, a squadron of the 16th Lancers, which, under Major Campbell, had done valuable service in reconnoitring and maintaining communication with the French on my left, was withdrawn and replaced by a squadron of the 19th Hussars, which likewise proved both enterprising and useful. I also had attached to me about this time what then possessed considerable novelty, an anti-aircraft gun, under Captain Hudson, Royal Garrison Artillery, whose refreshing optimism as to the number of “birds” he brought down or wounded was a source of much amusement to myself and staff.

The Germans meantime had brought up heavy guns, and hardly a day passed without our receiving considerable attention at their hands, while our own howitzers, being completely outranged and unable to silence the opposing batteries, were principally used against the enemy's trenches. On the 17th of September it had evidently been their intention to attack, a fact which was corroborated later by a prisoner, for about 10.30 a.m., as I was making my daily tour of

my front, a heavy bombardment began, partly directed upon the village and partly upon the trenches and the ground immediately in rear. My brigade-major and I had traversed half the line and had reached a slightly hollow road, which ran parallel to the trenches and some 300 yards in rear, when the German howitzers became active and shells were soon bursting all around. We made our way to a block of solid farm buildings, behind which were several gun limbers with their teams, which had brought up ammunition for a battery near by in position.

For three-quarters of an hour the bombardment went on without interruption, and as it was the first time we had been subjected to the fire of heavy howitzers, it perhaps impressed itself more on our memories than did subsequent displays of a similar nature. Fortunately, having had my suspicions of a hostile aeroplane, which the evening before had hovered over us and had seemed to pay special attention to the village which lay some 300 feet lower than the trenches, I had ordered the whole of the transport and the bivouacs of the two reserve battalions to be shifted after breakfast. When, therefore, the German howitzers opened fire, their shells, while causing great damage to the houses, failed to inflict much harm upon the troops or transport.

On the hills above, and some 600 yards distant from the village, whence I watched the display, I was astonished to observe that large fragments of shell

came hurtling through the air, but so far as I could see they struck no one. I felt anxiety for my horses, which were stabled in a very solidly built stone building on the main street of the village, and as the bombardment became less intense, my brigade-major and I clambered down the hill to get a closer view of what was going on. General Hunter-Weston, I found, had had a narrow escape, a shell passing through the house in which were his headquarters, while the field hospital had been wrecked and the patients with some difficulty extricated. My horses and groom, Private Venner of the 3rd Hussars, had had a wonderful escape, for a shell had driven in the wall of the house and had killed three horses and three orderlies inside, while it had done almost as much damage in the yard outside. My horses were not, however, in this stable, but in an adjoining one separated from that in which the shell had burst by a thin wooden partition, which showed sanguinary and other signs of what had taken place. My servant and groom, who had been sleeping in the stable, transferred their charges with a minimum of delay to a place of comparative safety.

The shell fire during this day was stated to have been accurate and caused a good many casualties, including several officers, and I felt some little anxiety, as the troops had not yet got thoroughly accustomed to it, and one could not be quite certain what they might do. The day's experience was, however, valuable, as after it there was less need to impress on

all ranks the necessity for digging deep and sufficient cover as soon as they occupied a position.

It also suggested the advisability of trying to attract the attention of the German guns from the trenches and the village. With this object I had a dummy battery of four guns prepared and placed some little distance clear of the houses in the flat ground which lay between us and the river. The fictitious guns, close to which we sometimes burnt straw to simulate the smoke of firing, were soon noted by the German aeroplanes, which were fairly active at this period, and served in some degree to draw fire where its effect was harmless.

As our headquarters cottage was at a cross-road which had been the target of several shells and had not escaped injury, we moved to a château at the eastern end of the village, where I remained during the period our troops held their positions on the Aisne. The owner was a Monsieur Macherez, a name which will long be remembered in that department of France on account of his mother, who was, and I believe still is, Maire of Soissons, a woman of intrepid character who admirably performed the duties of that post in strenuous, not to say dangerous, times. The château itself had originally been a monastery, and some of the ancient remains showing its ecclesiastical connection could be traced here and there in its walls and windows and in the round-tower which stood a little distance apart in the old-world garden.

We were now fairly committed to trench warfare, which was bound sooner or later to have resulted from the huge forces placed in the field by both sides and the limited frontage available for deployment. I had had a good deal of experience of a campaign of this nature when attached to the Japanese Army in Manchuria in 1904-5. There the possibility of striking a blow at the enemy's vitals—his line of communication—was always within reach provided sufficient troops had been forthcoming, while in the campaign in France and Flanders, even with the priceless possession of sea command, the attainment of such an object, once the front was held by our opponents from Switzerland to the sea, was out of the question. There were optimists, both at home and in the field—mostly, I think, in high places—who, in spite of the stalemate that was now developing, still prophesied a war of comparatively brief duration; but my own impression was that a campaign of such magnitude could not terminate in a manner satisfactory to ourselves and our Allies without a struggle covering a considerable interval of time.

Our position, as I have already stated, ran along the high ground overlooking the River Aisne. Between Bucy, which nestled along the road to Soissons, and the river there was a space of level, somewhat swampy ground, varying in width from half a mile to thrice as much. Across this ground at its widest part ran the road to Venizel, along which supplies and reinforce-

ments had to come. The maintenance of our position on the high ground was therefore essential, and a retreat therefrom, even if carried out at night, would have been a hazardous operation, rendered still more so by the possibility of finding the pontoon bridge at Venizel destroyed by hostile shells. At first the suggestion that additional bridges should be provided, not with the view but in case of retreat, was not favourably received in higher quarters, but before we left the Aisne several alternative means of crossing had been made. As, however, there was no question of retreat, we set to work and soon made our line formidable enough to discourage the enemy from any effort to drive us from it, as he attempted to do at several points elsewhere. The steep drop from the front line to the village favoured the concealment and protection of reserves, and saved us much labour in the construction of communication trenches.

Another labour-saving and at the same time interesting feature of the position was the sandstone caves which occurred at intervals behind the front line, and which provided admirable cover for supporting troops. It was evident from the material with which the houses of the village were built that these caves had served as quarries, and it was stated that they had been utilized as hiding-places at the time of the French Revolution. Some of them ran for a considerable distance underground; and thinking that possibly they might penetrate as far as the German position, I had



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an examination made. But it was found that in most cases the existence of foul air or large quantities of débris, which had grown almost solid through course of time, would, even should they lead as far as the enemy's lines, serve as a fairly efficient obstacle between ourselves and him. One of these caves, whose mouth opened towards the German trenches, was a favourite target for hostile shells, and as it was the headquarters of my right battalion, one's daily visit there was sometimes attended with excitement.

To keep the men fit, the only safe ground for marching was the Soissons road that ran through the village parallel to the position, while the requirements of cleanliness were met by arranging with certain of the inhabitants who had remained behind to boil hot water in cauldrons. By this means every man of the brigade could get a hot bath at least once a week and have his clothes washed at regular intervals.

My own daily routine at this time was to rise an hour before dawn, when the troops stood to arms, and as a rule after reports had come in that all was quiet in front we breakfasted. The divisional commander would generally ride or motor across from his headquarters south of the Aisne while the day was still young, and go the round of the several brigade headquarters; and when Major-General Sir Henry Rawlinson took command of the division for a short time he several times visited the front trenches and made suggestions for improvement. That, of course,

was a daily duty with me, sometimes in the morning, sometimes later, and not infrequently when the enemy's guns were active my brigade-major and I had a somewhat lively walk. As days went by little wooden crosses, marking the spot where officers and men who had formed part of the daily toll were laid, would increase in number, and the care with which the men would tend the resting-places of their comrades was a pleasing and a touching sight.

The British soldier is singularly careless, for I do not think he is a fatalist, and as a rule will rather cross the open than walk up a communication trench, and put his head above the parapet to shoot in preference to using a loophole. As time goes by some become more careful, others more and more indifferent, and many of those who have fallen during the war have been victims of their own utter disregard of danger. To repress this lack of imagination, even if desirable, would be useless, for on the next occasion the same action that might have been before reproved would be repeated. It is not to be wondered at, then, that our losses in trench warfare have been heavy; but, after all, anything is better than to see men crouching low in trenches when there is no occasion and leaving to others the duty of picking off the enemy's sharpshooters, while themselves adopting the policy of "anything for a quiet life." Throughout the campaign I insisted on my troops maintaining a policy of aggressiveness, and would not

tolerate amenities such as occurred at times in other parts of the front. Some portions of the German Army tried on many occasions, more especially on days like Christmas and Easter, to fraternize with my troops, but the only encouragement they received was a rapid fire of musketry or a grenade or bomb flung into their trenches. It may have cost us valuable lives to maintain this spirit of hostility, but besides sending to their last account many of the enemy, the effect of the policy of aggression was that we were held in wholesome respect and our security from a possible surprise was considerably augmented. Moreover the deadening effect of trench warfare on the offensive spirit, on the desire to close with the enemy and fight him no matter the odds, or withstand his attack however overwhelming, was to a great measure overcome. Whether or not the attitude of my troops had any effect on the enemy I cannot say, but on the Aisne my position was never attacked. Night alarms were, however, not infrequent, for only after several months of war do troops as a rule learn to know instinctively when danger is really threatening, and exercise self-restraint in firing off their rifles.

While on the Aisne we suffered from the first symptoms of spy fever, which reached its climax later on, but was generally confined to troops recently arrived at the seat of war. Every army and every nation when engaged in a war of magnitude necessarily suffers from this disease in more or less degree,

but when engaged with a people who are well known from their history to be past-masters in the use of all means, orthodox or other, for gaining information or preventing their foe from acquiring it, it is natural that we should be specially on our guard. The British are by temperament unsuspicious—that is to say, the average, honest, healthy-minded Englishman is so. Consequently when we go to war, and rushing as is our way to extremes, some of us become violently suspicious. Fortunately we are not excitable and have a dislike of being made ridiculous, so that we do not attain to such heights of folly as other nations of less phlegmatic nature. I remember hearing when I was in Manchuria that spy fever, engendered through want of proper preventive measures, at one time became rife in the Russian Army. So much was this the case that Russian officers were sometimes arrested by their fellow-soldiers, who, thinking they were Japanese spies disguised, and regardless of their trying to prove the contrary by repeating information only likely to be known to a Russian or as a last resort reciting the Lord's Prayer, put them summarily to death. One Russian officer, it is true, was said to have escaped from so sudden a termination of his career through his presence of mind in telling his captors that he was the well-known General Kuroki, and that it was desirable to take him alive! I am not prepared to vouch for this story, but I am inclined to think that it contains a germ of truth.

The first signs of the malady among my own troops, if I except the usual stories of hostile motor-cars dashing here and there through the lines and refusing to stop when ordered, was associated with pigeons. One afternoon I was informed that it had been noticed that at an early hour daily a pigeon was seen to quit the precincts of a farmhouse which stood in the centre of a courtyard surrounded by a high wall, and fly towards the German lines. Two officers undertook to mount guard over the house, so as to be on the watch at dawn; but as I thought their amateur efforts might be discovered, I sent for two Scotland Yard detectives who were attached to the Third Army Corps. Their skilled researches, however, found nothing on which to base a charge that the occupants of the farm were in communication with the enemy.

The next inoculation took the form of imaginary signals flashed at night by someone hiding in the woods on the left bank of the Aisne. Careful compass bearings were taken by us to the spot where the lights were seen, but in no case did I ever hear of anything more extraordinary being discovered than a lamp or candle burning in a cottage window.

Some weeks later, when we had left our quarters on the Aisne, a circumstantial tale of a dynamo, which was reported as being used to transmit wireless messages to the enemy, was brought to me by an artillery officer. Without any warning the house where the offending instrument was said to be concealed was

searched, but nothing of a more harmful nature than a weaving machine could be found, which my informant, who had apparently made a previous search, blushing admitted had misled him.

I might cite hundreds of cases of supposed, and others of actual, spying, but the moral of them all is that to ignore spying by an enemy either in peace or war is foolish, not to say criminal, and that while troops can help detection by being on their guard and practising reticence with strangers, it is best for amateurs not to foul the pitch, but leave to the professional the prosecution of clues obtained. Such little incidents as that of the pigeons helped to relieve the monotony of trench warfare behind the trenches, but we had not then learned that the existence we were then leading was soon, and for a lengthened period, to become normal throughout the Army.

I think it was while we were on the Aisne that I suggested that a very considerable saving of boot-leather might be effected if boots, instead of being thrown away when the soles were worn through, and when there was neither time nor means to repair them, were to be collected periodically and sent home for that purpose. The frequent issue of new boots in place of worn-out ones was a constant source of sore feet, and, as it seemed probable that the British Army would soon enormously increase in numbers, I deemed that economies of all kinds ought to be considered.

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The idea came to me from having noticed the Japanese in Manchuria collecting their worn-out boots, which, labelled with the owner's name, were sent to Japan, and eventually came into his possession again should he be so fortunate as to be still alive. This matter of boot repair was taken up with praiseworthy thoroughness, and not long after a large establishment was created at Calais, where the necessary restorative treatment was applied.

On the left of my front at this time, and so long as I was on the Aisne, was the 45th French Division, which held positions on the right bank of the river north of Soissons, three miles west of Bucy, and beyond it extended other French troops who carried the line round in a northerly direction. Efforts were still said to be in progress with the object of driving back the German right, and more than one French Corps was stated to have marched round our rear on its way to increase the pressure which was being exerted. From time to time we would receive warning that our neighbours were about to initiate an attack in order to gain a coveted position north of Soissons, and directing us to co-operate, but the ground in front of the sector which we held stretched like a glacis to the German trenches, and except by fire it was impossible for us to assist. Moreover, our position on high ground across a wide valley did not favour support by field artillery, while that of the Germans on a level slightly higher than our own

allowed them to utilize their guns, both light and heavy, to the fullest advantage.

On the 1st of October reports were flying about regarding the expected withdrawal of troops from the British front and their transference to another section of the line, and on the 5th orders came for us to move.

The 19th Infantry Brigade had left me a fortnight earlier—on the 21st of September—for our position by that date was growing stronger, and so large a reserve was probably considered no longer necessary.

On the 6th of October a French colonel and several officers arrived in order to acquaint themselves with the line which they were to take over from us, and after their visit to the front jokingly remarked that the trenches were so good and deep that they would have difficulty in preventing their men from lying down and sleeping when they ought to be otherwise engaged. At 11 p.m. their troops began to arrive at Bucy, and by 2 a.m. on the 7th the relief was completed and the last companies of my brigade left the ground which for three weeks they had held on the right bank of the River Aisne.



## CHAPTER VI

### FROM THE AISNE TO ARMENTIÈRES

THE moon was shining brightly as we directed our footsteps towards the bridge at Venizel, whence we followed for some miles the route which we had taken on our northward march. We passed through Septmonts, the home of the irascible chatelaine who, I heard, had not yet recovered from the incident of the rose-trees, and arrived at Hartennes, which was to be our halting-place, soon after daybreak. It had been no little pleasure again to stretch our legs after the sedentary existence on the Aisne, and the bright moonlight and feeling of moving forward into the unknown added not a little to our enjoyment of the change. At Hartennes we spent a quiet day, my billet being a dirty and rather odoriferous house, while the men were well hidden in thick woods close by, lest the enemy should discover that a movement was in progress.

It was at this village that an Alsatian lady told one of my staff that a German prince had occupied her house some weeks earlier, and had removed a quantity

of valuable curios, medals, and suchlike, which her husband had collected.

We remained at this place all day and at 10.30 p.m., in company with some guns and ambulances, moved by Oulchy-la-Ville to Rozet St. Albin, where we arrived at 1.45 a.m., in time for a few hours' sleep in comfortable quarters. My staff and I were billeted in a rather neglected-looking château, belonging, I believe, to Count Berthier de Savigny.

We seemed to be getting back once more to civilization, for a number of trains, some carrying French troops, passed along the railway close by during the day.

I found some English and other books in the château, the perusal of which as well as letter-writing filled the time until the moment came for us to move again. This we did at 4.30 in the afternoon, knowing that we had a longish distance to get over before reaching our next billet.

Our route lay through Chouy, then across our northward track of the 11th of September and past the Château de Mancreux, near which we halted for two hours to cook the men their evening meal. I rode on to the château, whose white stone walls and turrets looked imposing in the brilliant moonlight, and dined with the divisional staff, who had made their quarters there since the night before. In the dining-room of the château, which belongs to the Marquis de Lubersac, who was at Biarritz with his family, I

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recollect a somewhat striking portrait of a boy. The Germans had been here some weeks earlier, and the butler stated that they had touched nothing except some miniatures which they had stolen, and, of course, had drunk the cellar dry of champagne and other wines.

At 9.15 p.m. we marched again by Vouty, Dampleux, and through the Forêt Domaniale de Retz, the moon striking through the tall trees and lighting up the long silent stream of men in a strange, unearthly manner; and then by Villers-Cotterets, Pisseleux to Coyolles, which we reached at 2 a.m. Doubtless the Germans by this time must have discovered that the British troops in front of them on the Aisne had gone and that French troops had replaced them; but by moving at night and keeping under the cover of woods and villages by day, the direction of our march had at least been kept concealed from aeroplanes.

At the Château de Coyolles, where I was billeted, were several officers of the French 7th Dragoons, but as they were up betimes and we still making up for lost sleep, we did not meet each other. These were the best quarters that I, as a brigade commander, had so far occupied, and here as elsewhere one's imagination was not to be restrained from conjuring up pictures regarding their normal inmates and their way of life. None of them was present, and the only representative was a caretaker, who told me with disgust that the German officers who had passed

through had, as was to be expected, appropriated all the silver spoons and forks.

I spent several hours writing in the study of the proprietor, Monsieur Morian, and saw among his books one which carried my thoughts back a hundred years. This was a small pamphlet bound in leather with the Imperial arms of the First Empire stamped on it in gold, the subject-matter of which was the history of the Forest of Compiègne. It had been bought at the sale of General Scharnhorst's effects—the well-known reorganizer or rather creator of the modern Prussian Army after the disastrous Jena campaign—and it seemed to me probable that he, after the manner of his light-fingered successors, had taken a fancy to this book, possibly when billeted at Compiègne during the invasion of France in 1814.

We left Coyolles at 3 p.m. on the 9th, our destination being Rully, which we had passed through on the 1st of September during the retreat. The march was a dull one, as the country was very open and not wooded, and the roads, being mostly cobbled and a source of sore feet, were not appreciated by the men.

We went through Vauciennes, Vaumoise, Crépy-en-Valois, Duvy, and Bazoches, reaching Rully at 9.30 p.m., where the schoolmistress, Mademoiselle Terrière, most kindly insisted on my making use of her apartment in the Mairie. She had wisely gone to Paris during the few days that the Germans were overrunning the country south of Rully, and on return-

ing there had found that her possessions had suffered in her absence. Much of the damage done here and elsewhere—and of this I had visual proof—was of the vindictive order, added to which the habits of the German soldiery seemed to have been generally of a particularly filthy nature.

At Rully I was informed that my brigade was to entrain, part at Pont Ste. Maxence and part at Longueil, billeting at Pontpoint and Verberie respectively. I marched with the former portion, with which were the Seaforth Highlanders and Royal Dublin Fusiliers, proceeding by Raray, Villeneuve-sur-Verberie, St. Pierre, and Pontpoint, where we were billeted, until it was time to board the train, in the house of a Mademoiselle Marmillant, whose housekeeper told me she was in Paris. The Germans had passed through Pontpoint, and though they had made no stay, had remained long enough to remove all the wine they could find and get thoroughly intoxicated.

This passion of the German soldiers for drink had frequently come to our notice, and the amount of wine consumed by them in Northern France in 1914 must have been stupendous. On the other hand, though when passing through the wine districts of France the temptations were great, there was singularly little drunkenness among our men, and to their honour be it said that during the retreat I cannot recall having seen a single British soldier in a state of intoxication.

At 10 p.m., after sending on our horses to the station, we crossed the Oise by the temporary bridge of huge barges, which had been constructed to replace the permanent one blown up during the retreat.

The arrangements for the train journey were not at all satisfactory, for the men had to travel in trucks that had recently carried cattle and horses, and it was now too late to procure any straw. We left at midnight in two long trains, which moved at an interval of four hours, and at 10.30 a.m., on Sunday the 11th, reached Hesdigneul, which is about four miles south-east of Boulogne. There we heard with some surprise that Antwerp had fallen, and anticipated that the besieging troops would now march westward, to meet which movement we had no doubt been transferred from our trenches on the Aisne.

Later in the day we continued our journey to Wizernes, which was reached at 4 p.m., whence I rode to St. Omer, where my headquarters were at 114 rue Dunkerque, the brigade being quartered in barracks. The latest news here was that the British 7th Division was covering the retirement of the Belgians from Antwerp, and Germans, probably cavalry only, were reported to be between Cassel and Hazebrouck. The 6th Division from the Aisne had already arrived, and our own division, the 4th, was to be concentrated by the 13th of October.

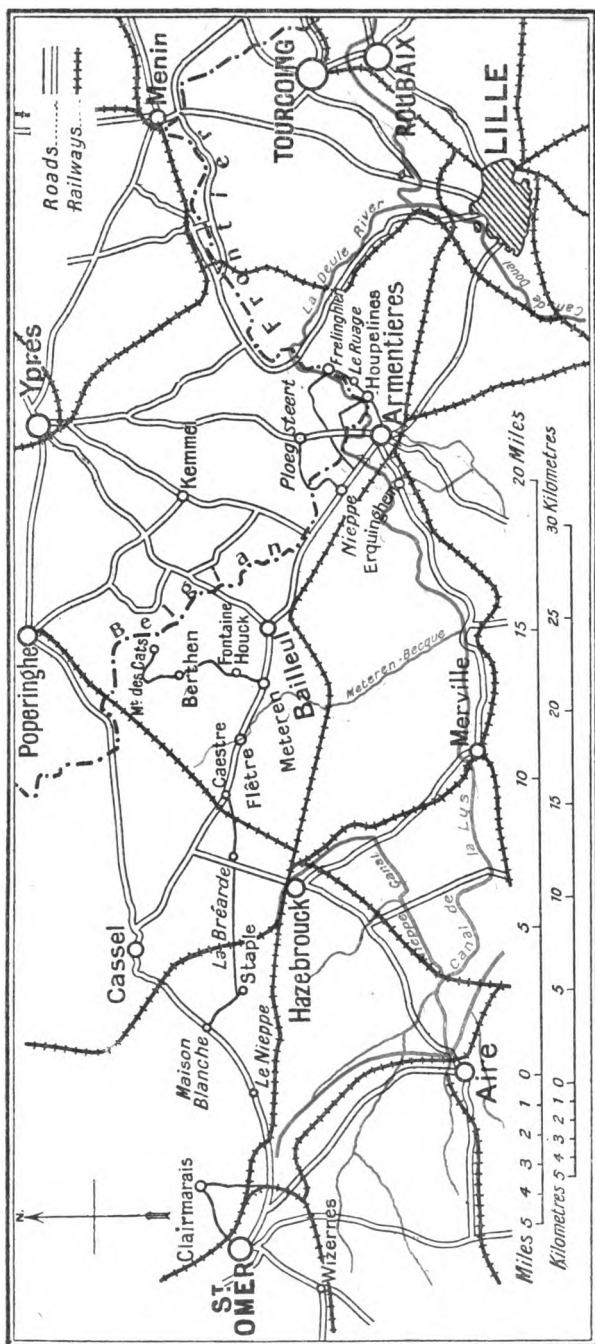
My quarters were in the school, or rather in the apartment of the curé in charge, who was holding a

service when we arrived, and as soon as he was free did everything in his power to make us comfortable.

Next morning I was told that the transport of the brigade was to be sent to Hazebrouck, and that the troops would be conveyed there by motor omnibus furnished by the French military authorities, between 1 and 2 p.m. The motors, however, did not arrive till 6 o'clock, and then only a small portion, the remainder reaching St. Omer later.

I went for a stroll through the public gardens, where the begonias were looking their best, and then into the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame des Miracles, which contains some fine wood-carving and two pictures by Rubens. While I was inside the sacred edifice a German aeroplane dropped four bombs into the town, killing three women and severely injuring a child. It is possible that they were intended for my brigade, the whole of which was assembled on the Grand Place and presented an excellent target.

It was past 7 o'clock before the leading motor omnibus had cleared St. Omer and took the road to La Br  arde by a very roundabout route through Clairmarais, Le Nieppe, Maison Blanche, and Staple. Some of the motors lost their way, and others, leaving the main road in error, got bogged in Clairmarais forest. I spent several hours in hunting for them, and when I reached Caestre, which was to be our halting-place for a few hours, it was nearly 3 a.m., and only two battalions had arrived.



LONDON : EDWARD ARNOLD.

OPERATIONS EAST OF ST. OMER.





At 6 a.m. I was up, and shortly after an order came for us to be ready to march at 7.

Meanwhile an official of the village—the maire or curé, I forget which—had come to see me regarding the burial of a German prince, who, he said, had been killed by a shell in a cavalry action on the Mont des Cats the day before, and whose remains had been carried to the village. He was unaware of the identity of the officer, who I afterwards heard was Prince Max of Hesse, but was anxious to be told what form of burial would be correct and on whom the expenses would fall. I told him that the simplest form, whether for prince or private, was the best, and that the expenses, which would be chargeable to his Government, ought to be slight. Some months later a tale was current that the German Government had made inquiries as to the place where the officer had been buried, possibly with a view to the removal of the corpse. This information, it was said, the astute village official firmly declined to reveal until such time as he had been fully reimbursed for the outlay he had incurred.

As all my troops had not arrived by 7 a.m., the hour of our march was postponed to 9.45, when I moved off the 1st Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment and 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders, as well as the 88th Battery, which formed the advanced guard.

We took the road to Flêtre, preceded by the divisional cavalry squadron of the 19th Hussars and

the cyclist company, who soon reported that the ground immediately west of Meteren was entrenched and held by the enemy. Clearing away a barricade east of Flêtre, the leading companies of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment had got some distance past that place when General de Lisle rode up and said that the cavalry division, which was on my left, was advancing against Berthen and that one of his brigades was about to attack Fontaine Houck, midway between that place and Meteren. I replied that I was likewise about to attack and would work in conjunction with him. I then sent reinforcements to the vanguard and ordered the guns to come into action south of Flêtre, but the slight fog that hung about all day made observation very difficult.

The vanguard continued steadily to gain ground and took some farm buildings on the Meteren Becque and captured a Bavarian Jaeger, from whom we gleaned some information.

The divisional commander now arrived (1 p.m.), and directed me to hold hard and not to push the attack, as it had been arranged that the 4th Division and the 6th on its right were to make a general attack at 2.30 p.m. I was disappointed, for my impression at this time was that with the help of the cavalry, which was pushing forward on my left, I could have gained Meteren, and the ease with which the Royal Warwickshires, skilfully using the features of the ground, were making headway confirmed that

impression. I sent instructions to that regiment in accordance with those I had myself received, and walked to the headquarters of the battalion, where, finding that the advance was still in progress, the adjutant was sent to stop it. The delay that now occurred was responsible for many of the casualties, for as long as the men were moving forward rapidly they prevented the enemy from bringing an accurate fire to bear upon them.

At 2 p.m. orders for the attack to take place at 3.15 arrived, and at the latter hour the Seaforth Highlanders and Royal Irish Fusiliers began advancing direct on Meteren north of the road. I had meantime moved my headquarters to the left, taking with me the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, whom I launched against the enemy's right near Fontaine Houck, and in place of whom, as my reserve, Brigadier-General Briggs offered to lend me two cavalry regiments.

The frontal attack, supported by the guns of the 14th Field Artillery Brigade, was pushed with great dash and determination, causing the enemy to quit his trenches and leave his wounded behind him. Unfortunately, the flank attack which should have struck the enemy's right and impeded his withdrawal failed owing to the battalion allotted to carry it out being drawn off in a wrong direction by a message from the cavalry on its left. The actual village of Meteren, though I believe it had been vacated by the Germans,

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was not occupied by the troops on my right, in whose zone it lay, till late at night.

The rain had begun to fall heavily about 4 o'clock, and to find my battalions in the dark proved to be no easy matter. However, by dint of searching, my staff and I found the commanding officer, Major Poole, of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and through him traced the whereabouts of the remainder of the brigade, part of which had taken up an outpost position on the ridge north of Meteren. After issuing the necessary orders, arranging for supplies of food and ammunition, and ascertaining that the collection of the wounded was proceeding satisfactorily, I returned to Flêtre. There I reported the result of the action to the divisional commander, and remained for the night.

The affair at Meteren was the last involving anything approaching to manœuvre that we were to take part in for many a day, and to me and my troops it was particularly interesting for that reason. Except for the failure of my outflanking battalion to move on its assigned objective, the troops had carried out their several tasks in faultless manner, and, thanks to their training prior to the war, had utilized to the full the broken nature of the ground. They had attacked, though far from fresh, with admirable keenness and were not unnaturally elated with their success. Their losses, which included a very gallant officer, Major Christie of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, who had been with the vanguard till he fell mortally

wounded, amounted in all to 246, an insignificant total compared with the casualties which we were later on to suffer.

Next morning, the 14th, was dull and rainy and we made no move till 4 p.m., when my brigade marched to Meteren, where we were ordered to go into billets.

Before leaving Flêtre two senior officers of the Royal Engineers looked in at my headquarters, and from them I got some news of the general situation. They told me that Sir Henry Rawlinson, with the 7th Division and some cavalry under General Byng, was moving to Ypres, and that the 2nd Division had come up from the Aisne, but the 1st Division was still on that river. I was rather surprised to learn that they were on their way to see if the ground in the vicinity of Bailleul was suitable for defence, for, in my ignorance of the fact that the enemy was then bringing up fresh troops, there was nothing outwardly to indicate so sudden a change of policy as a reversal to defensive tactics. Later in the afternoon, however, I heard that a wireless telegram had been intercepted which disclosed the information that the Nineteenth German Reserve Corps was moving against us.

At Meteren I was quartered in the house of Monsieur Pierre de Swarte, whose two sisters lived with him. He happened to be from home on the 13th when the fighting close by was in progress, and the remainder of the household had been bidden by the Germans to take refuge in the cellars.

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One of his sisters told me that a Bavarian general had been quartered on them, and had caused her considerable annoyance by appropriating her store of toilet soap, while some of his followers had abstracted as gifts for their women-folk articles of apparel, including nine chemises belonging to the servant-girl ! She added that she would sooner have a zoo let loose in her house than have a single German in occupation. The contrast between our behaviour and that of our predecessors, or the difference in nationality, caused our hosts to shower upon us the utmost attention. I was given the best bedroom, which somehow had been preserved from the Germans and which contained some Empire furniture of the purest type, such as might have belonged to Napoleon himself, for the bed, chairs, and wardrobe were thickly adorned with golden bees, and above my head as I slept a large gilt eagle spread its wings.

Early next morning I went for a stroll over the ground which the Germans had held on the 13th, and afterwards mounted to the top of a high building in order to see as much as possible of the surrounding country.

At 5.15 p.m. we made another short march to Bailleul, a town which is, I believe, associated with John Balliol and, of course, the famous college of that name. Here I was billeted in the house of Monsieur Maurice Bécue, which is situated on the Grand Place. He also was most attentive to us, and told me that

he had fortunately sent his family to the seaside some weeks earlier, as the Germans had left behind them in Bailleul a record of gross brutality which I imagine will not quickly be forgotten or forgiven.

Next day we left Bailleul and again made a short march towards Armentières, my night quarters being in the Estaminet des Deux Nations, a few yards inside the Belgian frontier.

I should perhaps explain here that, as we had conjectured, the movement of the British troops from the Aisne was intended, in conjunction with the 7th British Division, the Belgian Army and some French Territorial divisions, to block the advance of the Germans westward to the Channel. Had we been in greater strength and could we have arrived earlier, we doubtless might have prevented the hostile occupation of a considerable part of Flanders, but the Allies may consider themselves fortunate that their lack of adequate preparation did not cause them temporary loss of more than territory.

Early on the 17th the 10th Brigade, which was on the right of the 4th Division, was ordered to move by Erquinghem on the River Lys and secure the large manufacturing town of Armentières. The former place was the scene, described by Dumas in "*Les Trois Mousquetaires*," of the beheading of Miladi by the executioner of Lille. I had always imagined the River Lys at this point as running through a narrow, thickly wooded valley offering a far more picturesque setting



for the deed of summary justice than what I now beheld. The river here, and generally, is sluggish and with no banks worthy of the name. In fact, like many of the scenes which one's imagination conjures up, this one was painfully at issue with reality.

I sent on a battalion to Erquinghem, where the bridge which had been barricaded by the Germans, but not destroyed, was in our hands. The enemy must have intended at one time to oppose our advance across the river, for the ground on the river bank, close to the stream, was carefully entrenched.

On arriving at the bridge, I found a large crowd of refugees who proposed to return to Armentières along with the troops. As such gatherings not infrequently harbour spies, I took steps to prevent their leaving Erquinghem until the Assistant Provost-Marshal of the division arrived.

While waiting by the bridge for reports from the advanced guard, a patrol of Belgian Scouts rode up on bicycles, and told me that they had been sent to ascertain if the Germans were moving from Tournai towards Thielt, where some of their troops then were, but that wherever they went they had been stopped by the advancing British. They manifested considerable animosity towards some prisoners who had been captured by my advanced guard, so much so that the escort had to intervene to prevent blows being struck. At this time we had not been much troubled

with Germans disguised in allied uniforms, and though the cyclists spoke French perfectly and were outwardly and visibly Belgians, and despite their attitude towards the prisoners, I have since thought that I ought unhesitatingly to have arrested them.

The advanced guard was meanwhile making slow progress, and I sent forward another battalion to join it, and at 4 p.m. rode to Armentières and on to Houpelines, the eastern suburb of the town, directing the remainder of the brigade to follow and billet in the former place.

On reaching Houpelines, I found that delay was being caused by a few determined men who were holding a farmhouse on the roadside, from which all efforts to dislodge them had failed. Already one of the best company commanders of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, Captain Carberry, had been killed, while several men of the regiment had lost their lives in gallant efforts to shoot down the desperadoes at close range or draw back into cover such of their comrades as had been wounded and were unable to move.

Unfortunately this day the advanced guard, for some reason unknown, had had no guns allotted to it, and there was no immediate prospect of clearing the obstruction by bringing down the walls on the heads of the unpleasant occupants. I therefore ordered the building to be set on fire, and suggested to the advanced guard commander the possibility of blowing it up as well, a procedure which, however, did not find

favour, as to approach the house by daylight and lay a charge at a vulnerable point meant almost certain death to anyone who might make the attempt.

As it was getting dark, I ordered outposts to be thrown out and rode back to Armentières, where I enjoyed the hospitality of the Maire, Monsieur Henri Chas, at his fine house in the rue Sadi Carnot.

Dinner was hardly over when Lieutenant Corblet of the French Navy, who was attached to headquarters of the 4th Division and who had been with my advanced guard during the day, arrived and asked to see me.

He had just come from what we called "Sydney Street" Farm, where he had tried to parley with the occupants, receiving a bullet in reply which seared his cheek. Then with a gallant private of the Irish Fusiliers he had tried to gain a door whence he hoped to take the enemy in rear and finish with him. This ruse had failed, and the soldier who had volunteered to help had fallen dead in his arms. After that attempts to close with the obstinate holders of the farm, who seemed determined to sell their lives as dearly as they could, were ordered to cease, and a ring of men was drawn round the place, making egress unobserved impossible.

Lieutenant Corblet told me that he had seen no signs to make him think that it was intended to blow up the building, but he strongly recommended that a howitzer, with high-explosive shell, should be

obtained and that therewith an end should be put to a somewhat ridiculous situation.

I went to headquarters of the 4th Division, and as a howitzer was not readily forthcoming, obtained an 18-pounder gun, which did not reach the scene of action until 11 p.m.

When I arrived there some time earlier I found that the building, which surrounded three sides of a small courtyard, was still burning and that from that side of it which overlooked the road shots were fired whenever anyone incautiously stepped from the surrounding gloom into the area illuminated by the flames. Captain R. Kentish of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, who had headed several gallant attempts to settle with the Saxon occupants—for Saxon soldiers they later proved to be—and save from the burning débris men who had fallen wounded close to the building, told me that a charge had been laid and would soon be ready for firing, and that as it was expected to blow down the wall facing the road, he had a party of men in the ditch prepared to open fire and prevent escape on that side.

All being ready, we withdrew to the shelter of an avenue of trees close to the farm, and a moment later a loud explosion took place, followed shortly after by the thud of falling bricks and timber. Kentish and I ran round to the roadside facing the room which, full of burning matter, was now exposed to view. His men were firing fiercely into the flames, whence,

strange to relate, shots came back and other sounds were heard. Soon all was over and the three determined holders of the farm were for ever silenced ; but in the morning a fourth, whose cries were heard during the night, was removed, wounded and somewhat burnt, to hospital.

It seems probable that the brave defenders of the building were under the delusion that their throats would be cut if captured, and for that reason had fought so tenaciously, for, from statements made by several prisoners, it had come to our knowledge that this preposterous idea had been spread by German officers in order to discourage their men from surrendering.

For this incident Kentish was awarded the D.S.O., the French lieutenant the M.C., and several men the D.C.M.

I now returned to Armentières, but about midnight was disturbed by heavy rifle fire, which I knew later was an attack on the Royal Irish Fusiliers and which they easily repulsed.

Next morning at 5 I rode to Houpelines, where I remained all day, making some slight progress eastward until ordered to hold my ground. From the top of a lofty building, which soon attracted the German howitzers, I got a fair view of the surrounding country, but its level nature and the frequent rows of tall trees made distant vision far from clear.

In the afternoon that part of Houpelines in which,

in the tap room of an estaminet, my headquarters were was heavily shelled, a good deal of damage being done, while several women and children were killed and wounded either in the houses or the streets.

It was now becoming fairly evident that a resumption of trench warfare was at hand, though we were not without hopes that the cavalry, which was swinging round some distance on our left, and the 7th Division, which was somewhere further north, might help to avert a repetition of our dull and wearisome experiences on the Aisne. But other troops than these were also to be engaged between us and the sea, for the first battle of Ypres was developing, and British, French, and Belgians were soon to share in one of the toughest contests that took place during the first year of the war. My own brigade, however, was outside the area of disturbance, and if I am silent on the main events in Flanders or elsewhere at this time, it is because I purpose to restrict my narrative, as far as is consistent with lucidity, to those operations alone in which my troops or I took part or with which we were in some degree associated.

The ground which, as right brigade of the 4th Division, I now held stretched from the River Lys, close to the hamlet of Le Ruage, in a south-easterly direction, where north of the main railway line to Lille I came in touch with the 6th Division. The area looking east and southwards is flat and seamed with ditches, mostly full of water, some of which,

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unworthily, rise to the dignity of being styled *rivières*. The frequent roads, main and other, within the district, bordered as they are by poplar-trees, interfere with observation, and only by mounting to the top of tall chimneys or other lofty structures can a view, and that indifferent, be obtained. Rather less than a mile in front of my left and close to the River Lys, which here marks the frontier between France and Belgium, was the village of Frélinghien, which with the bridge across that stream lay within the German lines.

On the 18th I had been ordered to continue making progress to the front, but as I found that by doing so the gap between my right and the 6th Division was growing wider, I suggested that I might do better by attempting to seize Frélinghien, and so open up communication with the 11th Brigade across the river.

After telegraphing the proposal to headquarters, my staff and I adjourned to the house of a Scotsman rejoicing in the name of Ireland, whom I had met the previous day and who kindly invited us to stay with him while my brigade remained in the vicinity of Houpelines.

Mr. Ireland was a native of Auchterarder, and told me that his grandfather, who hailed from Dundee, had been responsible for initiating the flax industry in Armentières. His own factory was at Houpelines, and his house was adjacent to it. Whether the Germans were aware of this fact or wished to make observation from the church tower close by impossible, they made

a point of throwing shells, incendiary or other, into the premises, which within a few weeks became, with their valuable contents, food for flames.

Next day I heard that my proposal regarding Frélinghien was approved, but as the order reached me somewhat late and darkness was desirable in order to move some of the troops into favourable positions, but little progress could be made. Two companies of the Seaforth Highlanders, under Captain H. F. Baillie, were, however, worked forward under cover of some cottages near La Ruage, whence I reconnoitred the position held by the Germans some 800 yards in front. As my own brigade, through losses, was now some hundreds below strength, I was lent for a few days the 1st Bn. Rifle Brigade of the 11th Brigade, under Captain H. Sturgis.

On the 20th I was up at 4 a.m., and on reaching my day headquarters in a cottage at Le Ruage, found that the remaining companies of the Seaforth Highlanders were pushing forward in the darkness to join the rest of the battalion, which was concealed behind some houses which lay between the river and the road to Frélinghien. I heard to my regret that Captain Baillie, on whose energy and coolness the success of the operations had so far depended, had been wounded in the foot and placed hors de combat.

The Germans, of whom not one was visible, appeared to be holding a line of trenches south of that village which overlooked a kind of basin, across which



ran obliquely towards the river what appeared from the willows that marked its course to be one of the numerous *rivières* to which reference has been made. Along this *rivière* I now directed a company of the Royal Irish Fusiliers to be sent, and, under the skilful leadership of Captain Kentish, it soon reached the eastern limit of the basin and thence worked its way to the northern side, where it was completely hidden from the Germans in the trenches overhead.

Meanwhile the Seaforth Highlanders had trickled forward under cover of the cottages, and moving to their right, gradually collected in front and on the right flank of the Germans, to delude whom into the belief that the attack was coming from the other flank I had moved more troops of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, under Captain Webber, against a farm which shortly after fell into their hands.

From the window of a cottage at Le Ruage I could see every movement of my troops, who soon gave evidence by fixing bayonets that they were about to charge; while such of the Germans as remained (for I had seen a number moving rearward by communication trenches) peered over their parapet and fired from time to time. The Seaforths and the Fusiliers now clambered up the north side of the basin, whilst others of the former regiment, gallantly led by Captain Methven, who fell at the head of his men, burst through a hedge and struck the enemy in flank, killing and wounding many as they attempted to escape.

The ground now taken was entrenched, the new front carried south-eastward till it connected with the trenches held by other troops of my brigade, and the prisoners of the 133rd and 134th Saxon Regiment, twenty-eight in number, were sent under escort to the rear.

I may be pardoned for describing at some length this small affair, but it rarely happens nowadays that a brigade commander can see every movement of his troops in action as I did this day. Indeed, his usual post on days of fighting is in a dug-out, where he spends his time with his ear glued to the telephone receiver, and has little chance of viewing the movements of his troops. All ranks of my brigade had been carefully practised at Shorncliffe in the use of ground on the historic area where Sir John Moore had trained the famous Light Brigade, and it was a proud moment for me to watch how well—indeed, faultlessly—the officers and non-commissioned officers handled their men when in close contact with the enemy. Moreover the attack was purely an affair of infantry, for by using guns the element of surprise would have been eliminated.

When I returned to my quarters at Houpelines I found that they had been shifted to the house of Monsieur Paul Laloy, as those which I had occupied on the previous night had during the day been wrecked by shells.

The front for which I was responsible at this time

measured in a straight line nearly two miles, but amounted to considerably more if the irregularity of the several trenches which had to be garrisoned be taken into consideration. My brigade, too, was now some 30 officers and 350 men below strength, and when on the 23rd of October I was told to extend to my right so as to cover an additional space of 800 yards and endeavour at the same time to keep a complete battalion in reserve, I felt not a little anxious for the safety of my position. Moreover, in front of our trenches, except for such barbed wire as could be collected from fences in the neighbourhood, there was no obstacle to impede the enemy's advance, and there is no doubt that had a determined attack been made at any part of my line, it must have been extremely difficult to have withstood it.

On the 21st and 22nd of October the Rifle Brigade, which I had not put into action, left me to rejoin its own brigade, and so attenuated did my line shortly afterwards become that I was ordered to desist from making attempts to gain more ground, a procedure which, indeed, had now ceased to be practicable.

We had ere this made some further progress on the left towards the bridge, principally by house-to-house fighting under the gallant leadership of Major Stockwell of the Seaforth Highlanders, who was hit and died of wounds. That regiment, which on every occasion we were engaged had rendered splendid service, had seized and occupied a large brewery,

where for several days the men were regaled with the excellent beer which it did not take long for them to discover in the vaults. The Germans, however, must have resented the loss of their favourite beverage, for on the 26th they pitched so many heavy bombs from a minenwerfer into the building that the holders were forced unwillingly to evacuate it and retire to a trench in rear, leaving behind them in their hurry to get clear of the falling débris the battalion mail and many parcels which had shortly before arrived from home.

This was the first occasion on which a minenwerfer had been encountered on my front, a weapon whose use in modern warfare is, I fancy, attributable to the Japanese, who employed it against the Russians in Manchuria. There the mine-thrower or mortar consisted of a wooden tube strengthened at intervals by stout bamboo ties. The Chief Engineer of the Second Japanese Army, to which I was attached during the war, not satisfied with so clumsy and unreliable a weapon, devised a light and handy form of mortar, the tube of which was made of stove-piping, and which could be carried like a knapsack on the back of a single man. The Germans, who had their military representatives in Manchuria, prepared mortars of various kinds prior to 1914, some of which were of wood and others of more durable material, and it was one of the latter type which disturbed the Seaforth Highlanders in the brewery on the 26th.

During these minor operations to the east of .

Houppelines I remember particularly one young officer of Artillery—Lieutenant Hess—who, in command of a section of 4.5 howitzers of Lieutenant-Colonel Battiscombe's brigade, constantly came under my notice. He handled his guns, which were close to my headquarters, 800 yards from the front line, with such skill and keenness that when orders were issued for our almost daily attempts to gain ground those who were to be engaged immediately asked if Hess were to assist. As soon as it was known that ammunition would be forthcoming to allow of the howitzers being used, the answer would be given in the affirmative, when satisfaction would be expressed ; for the troops knew that the guns would be handled so accurately as to allow them to keep much closer to the bursting shells covering their advance than they would otherwise care to have done. As a recognition of this young officer's good service he was soon after transferred to a horse artillery battery, and I regret to say fell in action a few months later.

About this time, I remember, an intelligence agent arrived one afternoon from General Headquarters, bringing with him a young Frenchman, some seventeen years of age, whose parents lived at Lille, and who was to be passed through our lines doubtless with the object of taking or obtaining information. I questioned the lad as to how he proposed to find his way through the hostile lines to his destination across country in the dark, and whether he understood what

would happen to him if he were caught. He replied that he knew the country pretty well, and that he hoped to be able to evade the Germans. I had considerable doubt as to the possibility of his accomplishing his mission, but gave instructions to Captain Kentish to pass him after dark through the sentries near the railway, which would, if he kept to its vicinity, help him to find his way. However, next morning I found that after I had left my day headquarters at Le Ruage the lad had thought better of the venture, and breaking into tears, had confessed he was afraid to go. My sympathies were entirely with him, for to pass through the German trenches would have been extremely difficult, and when next day the agent on receipt of a telegram returned for his victim, I suggested that it was unfair to send anyone of such tender age to almost certain death, and that I was very glad that the boy had had the sense to change his mind.

Our trenches by the end of October had day by day increased in strength, but as no troops were available to construct another line in rear, parties of French civilians, working under Royal Engineers, were employed for the purpose. These used to arrive on the scene of operations about dusk and work for a spell of four hours, for which they received the not too lavish wage of fourpence an hour. When going one's rounds it was an interesting and amusing spectacle to watch their anxiety to begin work and get below

ground as speedily as possible on nights when bullets were flying in their neighbourhood.

The attitude of the civilian population, male and female, when shells were hurtling through the air must not be passed by without remark. It may be that the male element is more conscious of danger than the weaker sex, or that the latter, as has been said by someone, is naturally less imaginative ; but there is no doubt that both in France and Flanders the women showed an extraordinary indifference to the considerable risks which they and their children often ran.

In Houpelines, which was severely shelled from time to time, I have seen the male inhabitants cautiously making their way through the streets and dodging from door to door as the shells flew overhead ; while their women-folk would walk calmly along, babe in arms, neither hurrying their pace nor seeming to observe that anything abnormal was in progress. It would often happen, too, that a certain portion of the village might be wrecked by high-explosive shells, causing many of the inhabitants to remove themselves and their belongings to safer quarters. A few days undisturbed by these noisy visitors would supervene, and the whole village would resume its normal air, the men working in the fields and gardens, the older women intent on household cares, while of the younger women and girls many could be seen sitting in the sun busily engaged in making lace.

Such scenes call to mind those which follow close

on the footsteps of an earthquake ; and as the domestic cat clings to its accustomed haunts, so the mass of human beings will return to a danger area rather than seek safety by deserting their homes.

I must not omit to recall the pluck displayed by three young Frenchwomen, who were sisters and lived in a house at the eastern extremity of Houpelines, near where shells frequently fell and where casualties among the troops were not uncommon. Their dwelling was conveniently situated for an advanced dressing station, and not only did they place several rooms at our disposal, but nursed the sick and wounded men who daily were admitted from the trenches on their way to hospitals in rear. I made several efforts to obtain for them some recognition of their services, but I regret to say they were not rewarded with success.

About this time great optimism prevailed in higher military circles regarding the future, which we nearer the front did not share. We knew that our troops had held their own against the enemy's fierce assaults east of Ypres, the foe in front of us was firmly established and showed no signs of giving way, and though strong French reinforcements were reported to be moving to the left of the British Army, there was nothing, so far as we could see, which would indicate that a repetition of the movement that led to the battles of the Marne and Aisne was about to take place. Optimism is very well in reason, but I venture to think



that in this war there has been in many quarters far too strong a tendency to arrive at hasty conclusions regarding the condition of the enemy and the prospect of a speedy termination of the struggle. To prophesy is proverbially dangerous, and when the prophet proves to have made a serious miscalculation, faith in his predictions grows weak, and confidence, which is bred of deeds, not words, evaporates.

On the 2nd of November, in accordance with orders received, I sent the only troops I had in reserve—a company of the 2nd Bn. Seaforth Highlanders and another of the 1st Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers—to assist the 11th Brigade north of the Lys, which was being heavily pressed. They were soon thrown into the fight, and rejoined the brigade a few days later, having lost more than half their number in killed, wounded, and missing.

I had, with some other brigadiers, been promoted Major-General on the 26th of October, and on the 6th of November was informed that I had been appointed to command the 3rd Division, which was then engaged east of Ypres. I was ordered to report myself on the 7th at the Château des Trois Tours near that place, where the headquarters of the First Corps were, and to which the 3rd Division was then temporarily attached. But as events turned out I was not to leave for about a fortnight, as the moment was undesirable for a change of commanders, and my successor in command of the 10th Infantry Brigade,

Colonel Macmahon, 4th Bn. Royal Fusiliers, who was killed a few days later, had to be replaced. I therefore remained at Houpelines, which was daily becoming less and less agreeable as a headquarters ; for close to the château in which we lived and to one side of it was a bridge over the Lys, which was a constant target for the shells of the German long-range guns, and those that missed the mark either flew past the other side of our dwelling or burst on the lawn, repeatedly smashing our windows and causing other damage. So uncertain did I feel our stay in these quarters to be, that every morning I had my small amount of kit packed up and brought down into the hall, so that should the house be wrecked or set on fire there would be a chance of salving my belongings.

The cellar of the house was crammed with refugees, and one day when the shelling was more accurate than usual and my staff and I had gone for a short time behind the house into safety more imaginary than real, a shell burst in the lodge-keeper's cottage, where, against the appeal of his wife, who was an habituée of the cellar, he had gone to obtain something. The unfortunate man was killed and the question of breaking the news to his wife arose, none of the women who were with her being willing to do so. We sent a French interpreter to Armentières, who found her brother-in-law, and some hours after the incident, when the prolonged absence of her husband had raised

## 148 A BRIGADE OF THE OLD ARMY

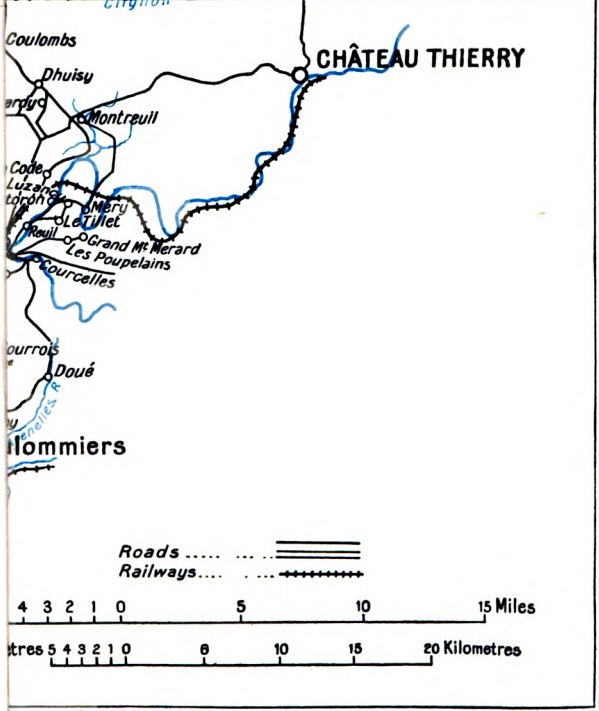
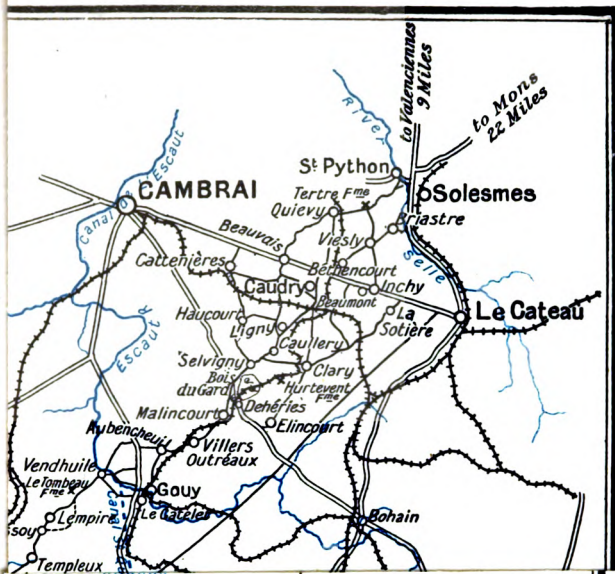
suspensions that something was wrong, the sad news was announced to her.

As the failure of the Germans to capture Ypres dawned upon them they expressed in customary fashion their "hate" by wrecking with artillery part of Armentières, but more especially Houplines; and for several nights the sky was illuminated by the flames from the burning flax warehouses. My horses, which were stabled in one of these buildings, had again a narrow escape and were with difficulty extricated, for the wind was high and the flames spread with great rapidity.

On the 16th November I was ordered to transfer my brigade to a front not far from Ploegsteert, north of the River Lys, being replaced by the 19th Infantry Brigade, which was commanded by a former brother officer and old friend of mine, Brigadier-General Hon. Frederic Gordon. Next night the relief was effected by 9.30, and we marched into our new position, my own headquarters being established in a farm (Rouge Port) inside the Belgian frontier. On the following day I bade farewell to my staff and left regretfully the brigade, which for nearly three years, at home and in the field, I had commanded, and went to the headquarters of the 4th Division at Nieppe. There I handed over my command to Brigadier-General C. P. A. Hull of the Middlesex Regiment, who had been appointed my successor. In the afternoon I went to Bailleul, as the guest of General Sir Horace

Smith-Dorrien, commanding the Second Corps, until such time as my new command, which was about to be given a few days' rest after the heavy fighting in which it had been engaged, should be withdrawn from the front line into billets south-west of Ypres.





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